Saints' Prayers

selected from the annals of history unto our current day

Meditations

If you make these meditations with true devotion, there will unfailingly be spiritual improvement in your life.

Meditations from St. Francis de Sales, Doctor of the Church: How to Meditate , I. , II. , III. , IV. , V. , VI. , VII. , VIII. , IX. , X.

Considerations from St. Alphonsus Maria de Liguori, Doctor of the Church: I. , II. , III. , IV. , V. , VI. , VII. , VIII.

Meditations for Advent, Christmas & Easter: How to Meditate , I. , II. , III. , IV. , V. , VI. , VII. , VIII. , IX. , X. , XI.

Meditations for Lent: I. , II. , III. , IV. , V. , VI. , VII. , VIII. , IX. , X.

Meditations from Rev. John Wyse: I. , II. , III. , IV. , V. , VI. , VII. , VIII. , IX. , X. , XI.

Meditations from St. Anselm of Canterbury, Doctor of the Church: Prologue to the Meditations , I. , II. , III. , IV. , V. , VI. , VII. , VIII.

Regular meditation every day is a key to the spiritual life.

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Meditations

Instructions on Meditation by St. Francis de Sales

from the book, 'Introduction to the Devout Life'
first written for St. Jane Frances de Chantal and now offered to all

A Short Method of Meditation

First, the Presence of God, the First Point of Preparation.

IT may be, my daughter, that you do not know how to practise mental prayer, for unfortunately it is a thing much neglected now-adays. I will therefore give you a short and easy method for using it, until such time as you may read sundry books written on the subject, and above all till practice teaches you how to use it more perfectly. And first of all, the Preparation, which consists of two points: first, placing yourself in the Presence of God; and second, asking His Aid. And in order to place your self in the Presence of God, I will suggest four chief considerations which you can use at first.

First, a lively earnest realisation that His Presence is universal; that is to say, that He is everywhere, and in all, and that there is no place, nothing in the world, devoid of His Most Holy Presence, so that, even as birds on the wing meet the air continually, we, let us go where we will, meet with that Presence always and everywhere. It is a truth which all are ready to grant, but all are not equally alive to its importance. A blind man when in the presence of his prince will preserve a reverential demeanour if told that the king is there, although unable to see him; but practically, what men do not see they easily forget, and so readily lapse into carelessness and irreverence. Just so, my child, we do not see our God, and although faith warns us that He is present, not beholding Him with our mortal eyes, we are too apt to forget Him, and act as though He were afar: for, while knowing perfectly that He is everywhere, if we do not think about it, it is much as though we knew it not. And therefore, before beginning to pray, it is needful always to rouse the soul to a stedfast remembrance and thought of the Presence of God. This is what David meant when he exclaimed, If I climb up to Heaven, Thou art there, and if I go down to hell, Thou art there also! And in like manner Jacob, who, beholding the ladder which went up to Heaven, cried out: Surely the Lord is in this

place and I knew it not meaning thereby that he had not thought of it; for assuredly he could not fail to know that God was everywhere and in all things. Therefore, when you make ready to pray, you must say with your whole heart, God is indeed here.

The second way of placing yourself in this Sacred Presence is to call to mind that God is not only present in the place where you are, but that He is very specially present in your heart and mind, which He kindles and inspires with His Holy Presence, abiding there as Heart of your heart, Spirit of your spirit. Just as the soul animates the whole body, and every member thereof, but abides especially in the heart, so God, while present everywhere, yet makes His special abode with our spirit. Therefore David calls Him the Strength of my heart; and St. Paul said that in Him we live and move and have our being. Dwell upon this thought until you have kindled a great reverence within your heart for God Who is so closely present to you.

The third way is to dwell upon the thought of our Lord, Who in His Ascended Humanity looks down upon all men, but most particularly on all Christians, because they are His children; above all, on those who pray, over whose doings He keeps watch. Nor is this any mere imagination, it is very truth, and although we see Him not, He is looking down upon us. It was given to St. Stephen in the hour of martyrdom thus to behold Him, and we may well say with the Bride of the Canticles, He looketh forth at the windows, showing Himself through the lattice.

The fourth way is simply to exercise your ordinary imagination, picturing the Saviour to yourself in His Sacred Humanity as if He were beside you just as we are wont to think of our friends, and fancy that we see or hear them at our side. But when the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar is there, then this Presence is no longer imaginary, but most real; and the sacred species are but as a veil from behind which the Present Saviour beholds and considers us, although we cannot see Him as He is.

Make use of one or other of these methods for placing yourself in the Presence of God before you begin to pray; do not try to use them all at once, but take one at a time, and that briefly and simply.

Invocation, the Second Point of Preparation

INVOCATION is made as follows: your soul, having realised God's Presence, will prostrate itself with the utmost reverence, acknowledging

its unworthiness to abide before His Sovereign Majesty; and yet knowing that He of His Goodness would have you come to Him, you must ask of Him grace to serve and worship Him in this your meditation. You may use some such brief and earnest words as those of David: Cast me not away from Thy Presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. Show me Thy Ways, O Lord, and teach me Thy paths. Give me understanding, and I shall keep Thy Law: yea, I shall keep it with my whole heart. I am Thy servant, O grant me understanding. Dwell too upon the thought of your guardian Angel, and of the Saints connected with the special mystery you are considering, as the Blessed Virgin, St. John, the Magdalene, the good thief, etc., if you are meditating in the Passion, so that you may share in their devout feelings and intention,and in the same way with other subjects.

The Third Point of Preparation, representing the Mystery to be meditated to Your Imagination

FOLLOWING upon these two ordinary points, there ere is a third, which is not necessary to all meditation, called by some the local representation, and by others the interior picture. It is simply kindling a vivid picture of the mystery to be meditated within your imagination, even as though you were actually beholding it. For instance, if you wish to meditate upon our Lord on His Cross, you will place yourself in imagination on Mount Calvary, as though you saw and heard all that occurred there during the Passion; or you can imagine to yourself all that the Evangelists describe as taking place where you are. In the same way, when you meditate upon death, bring the circumstances that will attend your own vividly to mind, and so of hell, or any subjects which involve visible, tangible circumstances. When it is a question of such mysteries as God's Greatness, His Attributes, the end of our creation, or other invisible things, you cannot make this use of your imagination. At most you may employ certain comparisons and similitudes, but these are not always opportune, and I would have you follow a very simple method, and not weary your mind with striving after new inventions. Still, often this use of the imagination tends to concentrate the mind on the mystery we wish to meditate, and to prevent our thoughts from wandering hither and thither, just as when you shut a bird within a cage, or fasten a hawk by its lures. Some people will tell you that it is better to confine yourself to mere abstract thought, and a simple mental and spiritual consideration of these mysteries, but this is too difficult for beginners; and until God calls you up higher, I would advise you, my daughter, to abide contentedly in the lowly valley I have pointed out.

Considerations, the Second Part of Meditation

AFTER this exercise of the imagination, we come to that of the understanding: for meditations, properly so called, are certain considerations by which we raise the affections to God and heavenly things. Now meditation differs therein from study and ordinary methods of thought which have not the Love of God or growth in holiness for their object, but some other end, such as the acquisition of learning or power of argument. So, when you have, as I said, limited the efforts of your mind within due bounds,whether by the imagination, if the subject be material, or by propositions, if it be a spiritual subject, you will begin to form reflections or considerations after the pattern of the meditations I have already sketched for you. And if your mind finds sufficient matter, light and fruit wherein to rest in any one consideration, dwell upon it, even as the bee, which hovers over one flower so long as it affords honey. But if you do not find wherewith to feed your mind, after a certain reasonable effort, then go on to another consideration, only be quiet and simple, and do not be eager or hurried.

The Third Part of Meditation, Affections and Resolutions

MEDITATION excites good desires in the will, or sensitive part of the soul, such as love of God and of our neighbour, a craving for the glory of Paradise, zeal for the salvation of others, imitation of our Lord's Example, compassion, thanksgiving, fear of God's wrath and of judgment, hatred of sin, trust in God's Goodness and Mercy, shame for our past life; and in all such affections you should pour out your soul as much as possible. If you want help in this, turn to some simple book of devotions, the Imitation of Christ, the Spiritual Combat, or whatever you find most helpful to your individual wants.

But, my daughter, you must not stop short in general affections, without turning them into special resolutions for your own correction and amendment. For instance, meditating on Our Dear Lord's First Word from the Cross, you will no doubt be roused to the desire of imitating Him in forgiving and loving your enemies. But that is not enough, unless you bring it to some practical resolution, such as, I will not be angered any more by the annoying things said of me by such or such a neighbour, nor by the slights offered me by such an one; but rather I will do such and such things in order to soften and conciliate them. In this way, my

daughter, you will soon correct your faults, whereas mere general resolutions would take but a slow and uncertain effect.

The Conclusion and Spiritual Bouquet

THE meditation should be concluded by three acts, made with the utmost humility. First, an act of thanksgiving; thanking God for the affections and resolutions with which He has inspired you, and for the Mercy and Goodness He has made known to you in the mystery you have been meditating. Secondly, an act of oblation, by which you offer your affections and resolutions to God, in union with His Own Goodness and Mercy, and the Death and Merits of His Son. The third act is one of petition, in which you ask God to give you a share in the Merits of His Dear Son, and a blessing on your affections and resolutions, to the end that you may be able to put them in practice. You will further pray for the Church, and all her Ministers, your relations, friends, and all others, using the Our Father as the most comprehensive and necessary of prayers.

Besides all this, I bade you gather a little bouquet of devotion, and what I mean is this. When walking in a beautiful garden most people are wont to gather a few flowers as they go, which they keep, and enjoy their scent during the day. So, when the mind explores some mystery in meditation, it is well to pick out one or more points that have specially arrested the attention, and are most likely to be helpful to you through the day, and this should be done at once before quitting the subject of your meditation.

Some Useful Hints as to Meditation

ABOVE all things, my daughter, strive when your meditation is ended to retain the thoughts and resolutions you have made as your earnest practice throughout the day. This is the real fruit of meditation, without which it is apt to be unprofitable, if not actually harmful inasmuch as to dwell upon virtues without practising them lends to puff us up with unrealities, until we begin to fancy ourselves all that we have meditated upon and resolved to be; which is all very well if our resolutions are earnest and substantial, but on the contrary hollow and dangerous if they are not put in practice. You must then diligently endeavour to carry out your resolutions, and seek for all opportunities, great or small. For instance, if your resolution was to win over those who oppose you by

gentleness, seek through the day any occasion of meeting such persons kindly, and if none offers, strive to speak well of them, and pray for them.

When you leave off this interior prayer, you must be careful to keep your heart in an even balance, lest the balm it has received in meditation be scattered. I mean, try to maintain silence for some brief space, and let your thoughts be transferred gradually from devotion to business, keeping alive the feelings and affections aroused in meditation as long as possible. Supposing some one to have received a precious porcelain vessel, filled with a most costly liquid, which he is going to carry home; how carefully he would go, not looking about, but watching stedfastly lest he trip or stumble, or lest he spill any of the contents of his vessel. Just so, after meditation, do not allow yourself forthwith to be distracted, but look straight before you. Of course, if you meet any one to whom you are bound to attend, you must act according to the circumstances in which you find yourself, but even thus give heed to your heart, so as to lose as little as possible of the precious fruits of your meditation. You should strive, too, to accustom yourself to go easily from prayer to all such occupations as your calling or position lawfully require of you, even although such occupations may seem uncongenial to the affections and thoughts just before forming part of your prayer. Thus the lawyer should be able to go from meditation to his pleading, the tradesman to his business, the mistress of a family to the cares of her household and her wifely duties, so calmly and gently as not to be in any way disturbed by so doing. In both you are fulfilling God's Will, and you should be able to turn from one to the other in a devout and humble spirit.

It may be that sometimes, immediately after your preparation, your affections will be wholly drawn to God, and then, my child, you must let go the reins, and not attempt to follow any given method; since, although as a general rule your considerations should precede your affections and resolutions, when the Holy Spirit gives you those affections at once, it is unnecessary to use the machinery which was intended to bring about the same result. In short, whenever such affections are kindled in your heart, accept them, and give them place in preference to all other considerations. The only object in placing the affections after the points of consideration in meditation, is to make the different parts of meditation clearer, for it is a general rule that when affections arise they are never to be checked, but always encouraged to flow freely. And this applies also to the acts of thanksgiving, of oblation and petition, which must not be restrained either, although it is well to repeat or renew them at the close of your meditation. But your resolutions must be made after the affections, and quite at the end of your meditation, and that all the

more because in these you must enter upon ordinary familiar subjects and things which would be liable to cause distractions if they were intruded among your spiritual affections.

Amid your affections and resolutions it is well occasionally to make use of colloquies, and to speak sometimes to your Lord, sometimes to your guardian Angel, or to those persons who are concerned in the mystery you are meditating, to the Saints, to yourself, your own heart, to sinners, and even to the inanimate creation around, as David so often does in the Psalms, as well as other Saints in their meditations and prayers.

Concerning Dryness in Meditation

SHOULD it happen sometimes, my daughter, that you have no taste for or consolation in your meditation, I entreat you not to be troubled, but seek relief in vocal prayer, bemoan yourself to our Lord, confess your unworthiness, implore His Aid, kiss His Image, if it be beside you, and say in the words of Jacob, I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me; or with the Canaanitish woman, Yes, Lord, I am as a dog before Thee, but the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table.

Or you can take a book, and read attentively till such time as your mind is calmed and quickened; or sometimes you may find help from external actions, such as prostrating yourself folding your hands upon your breast, kissing your Crucifix, that is, supposing you are alone. But if, after all this, you are still unrelieved, do not be disturbed at your dryness, however great it be, but continue striving after a devout attitude in God's Sight. What numbers of courtiers appear a hundred times at court without any hope of a word from their king, but merely to pay their homage and be seen of him. Just so, my daughter, we ought to enter upon mental prayer purely to fulfil our duty and testify our loyalty. If it pleases God's Divine Majesty to speak to us, and discourse in our hearts by His Holy Inspirations and inward consolations, it is doubtless a great honour, and very sweet to our soul; but if He does not vouchsafe such favours, but makes as though He saw us not,as though we were not in His Presence,nevertheless we must not quit it, but on the contrary we must remain calmly and devoutly before Him, and He is certain to accept our patient waiting, and give heed to our assiduity and perseverance; so that another time He will impart to us His consolations, and let us taste all the sweetness of holy meditation. But even were it not so, let us, my child, be satisfied with the privilege of being in His Presence and seen of Him.

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FIRST MEDITATION

Of Creation

Preparation

1. PLACE yourself in the Presence of God. 2. Ask Him to inspire your heart.

Considerations

1. Consider that but a few years since you were not born into the world, and your soul was as yet non-existent. Where wert thou then, O my soul? the world was already old, and yet of thee there was no sign.

2. God brought you out of this nothingness, in order to make you what you are, not because He had any need of you, but solely out of His Goodness.

3. Consider the being which God has given you; for it is the foremost being of this visible world, adapted to live eternally, and to be perfectly united to God's Divine Majesty.

Affections and Resolutions

1. Humble yourself utterly before God, saying with the Psalmist, O Lord, I am nothing in respect of Thee, what am I, that Thou shouldst remember me? O my soul, thou wert yet lost in that abyss of nothingness, if God had not called thee forth, and what of thee in such a case?

2. Give God thanks. O Great and Good Creator, what do I not owe Thee, Who didst take me from out that nothingness, by Thy Mercy to make me what I am? How can I ever do enough worthily to praise Thy Holy Name, and render due thanks to Thy Goodness?

3. Confess your own shame. But alas, O my Creator, so far from uniting myself to Thee by a loving service, I have rebelled against Thee through my unruly affections, departing from Thee, and giving myself up to sin, and ignoring Thy Goodness, as though Thou hadst not created me.

4. Prostrate thyself before God. O my soul, know that the Lord He is thy God, it is He that hath made thee, and not thou thyself. O God, I am the work of Thy Hands; henceforth I will not seek to rest in myself, who am nought. Wherein hast thou to glory, who art but dust and ashes? how canst thou, a very nothing, exalt thyself? In order to my own humiliation, I will do such and such a thing, "I will endure such contempt: "I will alter my ways and henceforth follow my Creator, and realise that I am honoured by His calling me to the being He has given; I will employ it solely to obey His Will, by means of the teaching He has given me, of which I will inquire more through my spiritual Father.

Conclusion

1. Thank God. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and praise His Holy Name with all thy being, because His Goodness called me forth from nothingness, and His Mercy created me.

2. Offer. O my God, I offer Thee with all my heart the being Thou hast given me, I dedicate and consecrate it to Thee.

3. Pray. O God, strengthen me in these affections and resolutions. Dear Lord, I commend me, and all those I love, to Thy never failing Mercy. OUR FATHER, etc.

At the end of your meditation linger a while, and gather, so to say, a little spiritual bouquet from the thoughts you have dwelt upon, the sweet perfume whereof may refresh you through the day.

Proceed to the Second Meditation

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SECOND MEDITATION

Of the End for which we were Created

Preparation

1. PLACE yourself before God. 2. Ask Him to inspire your heart.

Considerations

1. God did not bring you into the world because He had any need of you, useless as you are; but solely that He might show forth His Goodness in you, giving you His Grace and Glory. And to this end He gave you understanding that you might know Him, memory that you might think of Him, a will that you might love Him, imagination that you might realise

His mercies, sight that you might behold the marvels of His works, speech that you might praise Him, and so on with all your other faculties.

2. Being created and placed in the world for this intent, all contrary actions should be shunned and rejected, as also you should avoid as idle and superfluous whatever does not promote it.

2. Consider how unhappy they are who do not think of all this, who live as though they were created only to build and plant, to heap up riches and amuse themselves with trifles.

Affections and Resolutions

1. Humble yourself in that hitherto you have so little thought upon all this. Alas, my God, of what was I thinking when I did not think of Thee? what did I remember when I forgot Thee? what did I love when I loved Thee not? Alas, when I ought to have been feeding on the truth, I was but filling myself with vanity, and serving the world, which was made to serve me.

2. Abhor your past life. I renounce ye, O vain thoughts and useless cogitations, frivolous and hateful memories: I renounce all worthless friendships, all unprofitable efforts, and miserably ungrateful self-indulgence, all pitiful compliances.

3. Turn to God. Thou, my God and Saviour shalt henceforth be the sole object of my thoughts; no more will I give my mind to ideas which are displeasing to Thee. All the days of my life I will dwell upon the greatness of Thy Goodness, so lovingly poured out upon me. Thou shalt be henceforth the delight of my heart, the resting-place of all my affections. From this time forth I will forsake and abhor the vain pleasures and amusements, the empty pursuits which have absorbed my time; the unprofitable ties which have bound my heart I will loosen henceforth, and to that end I will use such and such remedies.

Conclusion

1. Thank God, Who has made you for so gracious an end. Thou hast made me, O Lord, for Thyself, that I may eternally enjoy the immensity of Thy Glory; when shall I be worthy thereof, when shall I know how to bless Thee as I ought?

2. Offer. O Dearest Lord, I offer Thee all my affections and resolutions, with my whole heart and soul.

3. Pray. I entreat Thee, O God, that Thou wouldest accept my desires and longings, and give Thy Blessing to my soul, to enable me to fulfil them, through the Merits of Thy Dear Son's Precious Blood shed upon the Cross for me. OUR FATHER, etc. Gather your little spiritual bouquet.

Return to the First Meditation . . . *Proceed to the Third Meditation*

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THIRD MEDITATION

Of the Gifts of God

Preparation

1. PLACE yourself in the Presence of God. 2. Ask Him to inspire your heart.

Considerations

1. Consider the material gifts God has given you, your body, and the means for its preservation; your health, and all that maintains it; your friends and many helps. Consider too how many persons more deserving than you are without these gifts; some suffering in health or limb, others exposed to injury, contempt and trouble, or sunk in poverty, while God has willed you to be better off.

2. Consider the mental gifts He has given you. Why are you not stupid, idiotic, insane like many you wot of? Again, God has favoured you with a decent and suitable education, while many have grown up in utter ignorance.

3. Further, consider His spiritual gifts. You are a child of His Church, God has taught you to know Himself from your youth. How often has He given you His Sacraments? what inspirations and interior light, what reproofs, He has given to lead you aright; how often He has forgiven you, how often delivered you from occasions of falling; what opportunities He has granted for your soul's progress! Dwell somewhat on the detail, see how Loving and Gracious God has been to you.

Affections and Resolutions

1. Marvel at God's Goodness. How good He has been to me, how abundant in mercy and plenteous in loving-kindness! O my soul, be thou ever telling of the great things the Lord has done for thee!

2. Marvel at your own ingratitude. What am I, Lord, that Thou rememberest me? How unworthy am I! I have trodden Thy Mercies under root, I have abused Thy Grace, turning it against Thy very Self; I have set the depth of my ingratitude against the deep of Thy Grace and Favour.

3. Kindle your gratitude. O my soul, be no more so faithless and disloyal to thy mighty Benefactor! How should not my whole soul serve the Lord, Who has done such great things in me and for me?

4. Go on, my daughter, to refrain from this or that material indulgence; let your body be wholly the servant of God, Who has done so much for it: set your soul to seek Him by this or that devout practice suitable thereto. Make diligent use of the means provided by the Church to help you to love God and save your soul. Resolve to be constant in prayer and seeking the Sacraments, in hearing God's Word, and in obeying His inspirations and counsels.

Conclusion

1. Thank God for the clearer knowledge He has given you of His benefits and your own duty.

2. Offer your heart and all its resolutions to Him.

3. Ask Him to strengthen you to fulfil them faithfully by the Merits of the Death of His Son. OUR FATHER, etc. Gather the little spiritual bouquet.

Return to the Second Meditation . . . *Proceed to the Fourth Meditation*

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FOURTH MEDITATION

On Sin

Preparation

1. PLACE yourself in the Presence of God. 2. Ask Him to inspire your heart.

Considerations

1. Consider how long it is since you first began to commit sin, and how since that first beginning sin has multiplied in your heart; how every day has added to the number of your sins against God, against yourself and against your neighbour, by deed, word, thought and desire.

2. Consider your evil tendencies, and how far you have followed them. These two points will show you that your sins are more in number than the hairs of your head, or the sand on the seashore.

3. Apart from sin, consider your ingratitude towards God, which is in itself a sin enfolding all the others, and adding to their enormity: consider the gifts which God has given you, and which you have turned against the Giver; especially the inspirations you have neglected, and the promptings to good which you have frustrated. Review the many Sacraments you have received, and see where are their fruits. Where are the precious jewels wherewith your Heavenly Bridegroom decked you? with what preparation have you received them? Reflect upon the ingratitude with which, while God sought to save you, you have fled from Him and rushed upon destruction.

Affections and Resolutions

1. Humble yourself in your wretchedness. O my God, how dare I come before Thine Eyes? I am but a corrupt being, a very sink of ingratitude and wickedness. Can it be that I have been so disloyal, that not one sense, not one faculty but has been sullied and stained; not one day has passed but I have sinned before Thee? Was this a fitting return for all my Creator's gifts, for my Redeemer's Blood?

2. Ask pardon; throw yourself at the Lord's Feet as the prodigal son, as the Magdalene, as the woman convicted of adultery. Have mercy, Lord, on me a sinner! O Living Fountain of Mercy, have pity on me, unworthy as I am.

3. Resolve to do better. Lord, with the help of Thy Grace I will never again give myself up to sin. I have loved it too well; henceforth I would abhor it and cleave to Thee. Father of Mercy, I would live and die to Thee.

4. In order to put away past sin, accuse yourself bravely of it, let there not be one sinful act which you do not bring to light.

5. Resolve to make every effort to tear up the roots of sin from your heart, especially this and that individual sin which troubles you most.

6. In order to do this, resolve stedfastly to follow the advice given you, and never think that you have done enough to atone for your past sin.

Conclusion

1. Thank God for having waited till now for you, and for rousing these good intentions in your heart. 2. Offer Him all your heart to carry them to good effect. 3. Pray that He would strengthen you.

Return to the Third Meditation . . . *Proceed to the Fifth Meditation*

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FIFTH MEDITATION

Of Death

Preparation

1. PLACE yourself in the Presence of God. 2. Ask His Grace. 3. Suppose yourself to be on your deathbed, in the last extremity, without the smallest hope of recovery.

Considerations

1. Consider the uncertainty as to the day of your death. One day your soul will quit this body: will it be in summer or winter? in town or country? by day or by night? will it be suddenly or with warning? will it be owing to sickness or an accident? will you have time to make your last confession or not? will your confessor or spiritual father be at hand or will he not? Alas, of all these things we know absolutely nothing: all that we do know is that die we shall, and for the most part sooner than we expect.

2. Consider that then the world is at end as far as you are concerned, there will be no more of it for you, it will be altogether overthrown for you, since all pleasures, vanities, worldly joys, empty delights will be as a mere fantastic vision to you. Woe is me, for what mere trifles and unrealities I have ventured to offend my God? Then you will see that what we preferred to Him was nought. But, on the other hand, all devotion and good works will then seem so precious and so sweet: Why did I not tread that pleasant path? Then what you thought to be little sins will look like huge mountains, and your devotion will seem but a very little thing.

3. Consider the universal farewell which your soul will take of this world. It will say farewell to riches, pleasures, and idle companions; to amusements and pastimes, to friends and neighbours, to husband, wife and child, in short to all creation. And lastly it will say farewell to its own body, which it will leave pale and cold, to become repulsive in decay.

4. Consider how the survivors will hasten to put that body away, and hide it beneath the earth and then the world will scarce give you another thought, or remember you, any more than you have done to those already gone. 'God rest his soul!' men will say, and that is all. O death, how pitiless, how hard thou art!

5. Consider that when it quits the body the soul must go at once to the right hand or the left. To which will your soul go? what side will it take? none other, be sure, than that to which it had voluntarily drawn while yet in this world.

Affections and Resolutions

1. Pray to God, and throw yourself into His Arms. O Lord, be Thou my stay in that day of anguish! May that hour be blessed and favourable to me, if all the rest of my life be full of sadness and trial.

2. Despise the world. Forasmuch as I know not the hour in which I must quit the world, I will not grow fond of it. O dear friends, beloved ones of my heart, be content that I cleave to you only with a holy friendship which may last for ever; why should I cling to you with a tie which must needs be broken?

I will prepare for the hour of death and take every precaution for its peaceful arrival; I will thoroughly examine into the state of my conscience, and put in order whatever is wanting.

Conclusion

Thank God for inspiring you with these resolutions: offer them to His Majesty: intreat Him anew to grant you a happy death by the Merits of His Dear Son's Death. Ask the prayers of the Blessed Virgin and the Saints. OUR FATHER, etc.

Gather a bouquet of myrrh.

Return to the Fourth Meditation . . . *Proceed to the Sixth Meditation*

Saints' Prayers

selected from the annals of history unto our current day

Meditations

The Spiritual Meditations of St. Francis de Sales

from the book, 'Introduction to the Devout Life'
first written for St. Jane Frances de Chantal and now offered to all

SIXTH MEDITATION

On Judgment

Preparation

1. PLACE yourself in the Presence of God. 2. Intreat Him to inspire you.

Considerations

1. When the time comes which God has appointed for the end of this world, and after many terrible signs and warnings, which will overwhelm men with fear, the whole earth will be destroyed, and nothing then left.

2. Afterwards, all men, save those already risen, shall rise from the dead, and at the voice of the Archangel appear in the valley of Jehoshaphat. But alas, with what divers aspects! for some will be glorious and shining, others horrible and ghastly.

3. Consider the majesty with which the Sovereign Judge will appear surrounded by all His Saints and Angels; His Cross, the Sign of Grace to the good and of terror to the evil, shining brighter than the sun.

4. This Sovereign Judge will with His awful word, instantly fulfilled, separate the evil and the good, setting the one on His Right Hand, the other on His Left, an eternal separation, for they will never meet again.

5. This separation made, the books of conscience will be opened, and all men will behold the malice of the wicked, and how they have contemned God; as also the penitence of the good, and the results of the grace they received. Nothing will be hid. O my God, what confusion to the one, what rejoicing to the other! Consider the final sentence of the wicked. Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. Dwell upon these awful words. Go, He says, for ever discarding these wretched sinners, banishing them for ever from His Presence. He calls them cursed: O my soul, what a curse: a curse involving all other

maledictions, all possible evil, an irrevocable curse, including all time and eternity; condemning them to everlasting fire. Think what that eternity of suffering implies.

6. Then consider the sentence of the good. Come, the Judge says, O blessed loving word with which God draws us to Himself and receives us in His Bosom. Blessed of My Father, O blessing above all blessings! inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world. O my God, and that Kingdom will know no end!

Affections and Resolutions

1. Tremble, my soul, at the thought. O God, who will be my stay in that hour when the pillars of the earth are shaken?

2. Abhor your sins, which alone can cause you to be lost when that fearful day comes. Surely I will judge myself now, that I be not judged; will examine my conscience, accuse, condemn, punish myself, that the Judge may not condemn me then. I will confess my faults, and follow the counsels given me.

Conclusion

Thank God for having given you means of safety in that terrible Day, and time for repentance. Offer Him your heart, and ask for grace to use it well. OUR FATHER, etc.

Gather your bouquet.

Return to the Fifth Meditation . . . *Proceed to the Seventh Meditation*

Saints' Prayers

selected from the annals of history unto our current day

Meditations

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SEVENTH MEDITATION

Of Hell

Preparation

1. PLACE yourself in God's Presence. 2. Humble yourself, and ask His Aid. 3. Picture to yourself a dark city, reeking with the flames of sulphur and brimstone, inhabited by citizens who cannot get forth.

Considerations

1. Even so the lost are plunged in their infernal abyss; suffering indescribable torture in every sense and every member; and that because having used their members and senses for sin, it is just that through them they should suffer now. Those eyes which delighted in impure vicious sights, now behold devils; the ears which took pleasure in unholy words, now are deafened with yells of despair; and so on with the other senses.

2. Beyond all these sufferings, there is one greater still, the privation and pain of loss of God's Glory, which is for ever denied to their vision. If Absalom cared not to be released from exile, if he might not see his father's face, how much sorer will it be to be deprived for ever of the blessed vision of God?

3. Consider how insupportable the pains of Hell will be by reason of their eternal duration. If the irritating bite of an insect, or the restlessness of fever, makes an ordinary night seem so long and tedious, how terrible will the endless night of eternity be, where nought will be found save despair, blasphemy and fury!

Affections and Resolutions

1. Read the Prophet's descriptions of the terrors of the Lord, and ask your soul whether it can face them, whether you can bear to lose your God for ever?

2. Confess that you have repeatedly deserved to do so. Resolve henceforth to act differently, and to rescue yourself from this abyss. Resolve on distinct definite acts by which you may avoid sin, and thereby eternal death.

Give thanks, offer yourself, pray.

Return to the Sixth Meditation . . . *Proceed to the Eighth Meditation*

Saints' Prayers

selected from the annals of history unto our current day

Meditations

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EIGHTH MEDITATION

On Paradise

Preparation

1. PLACE yourself in the Presence of God. 2. Invoke His Aid.

Considerations

1. Represent to yourself a lovely calm night, when the heavens are bright with innumerable stars: add to the beauty of such a night the utmost beauty of a glorious summer's day, the sun's brightness not hindering the clear shining of moon or stars, and then be sure that it all falls immeasurably short of the glory of Paradise. O bright and blessed country, O sweet and precious place!

2. Consider the beauty and perfection of the countless inhabitants of that blessed country; the millions and millions of angels, Cherubim and Seraphim; the glorious company of Apostles, martyrs, confessors, virgins, and saints. O blessed company, any one single member of which surpasses all the glory of this world, what will it be to behold them all, to sing with them the sweet Song of the Lamb? They rejoice with a perpetual joy, they share a bliss unspeakable, and unchangeable delights.

3. Consider how they enjoy the Presence of God, Who fills them with the richness of His Vision, which is a perfect ocean of delight; the joy of being for ever united to their Head. They are like happy birds, hovering and singing for ever within the atmosphere of divinity, which fills them with inconceivable pleasures. There each one vies without jealousy in singing the praises of the Creator. Blessed art Thou for ever, O Dear and Precious Lord and Redeemer, Who dost so freely give us of Thine Own Glory, they cry; and He in His turn pours out His ceaseless Blessing on His Saints. Blessed are ye, Mine own for ever, who have served Me faithfully, and with a good courage.

Affections and Resolutions

1. Admire and rejoice in the Heavenly Country; the glorious and blessed New Jerusalem.

2. Reprove the coldness of your own heart for having hitherto so little sought after that glorious abode. Why have I so long lingered indifferent to the eternal happiness set before me? Woe is me that, for the sake of poor savourless earthly things, I have so often forgotten those heavenly delights. How could I neglect such real treasures for mere vain and contemptible earthly matters?

3. Aspire earnestly after that blessed abode. Forasmuch, O Dear Lord, as Thou hast been pleased to turn my feet into Thy ways, never will I again

look back. Go forth, my soul, towards thy promised rest, journey unweariedly to that hoped-for land; wherefore shouldest thou tarry in Egypt?

4. Resolve to give up such and such things, which hinder you on the way, and to do such others as will help you thitherwards.

Give thanks, offer, pray.

Return to the Seventh Meditation . . . *Proceed to the Ninth Meditation*

Saints' Prayers

selected from the annals of history unto our current day

Meditations

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NINTH MEDITATION

On the Choice upon to you between Heaven and Hell

Preparation

1. PLACE yourself in the Presence of God. 2. Humble yourself before Him, and ask His inspiration.

Considerations

1. Imagine yourself alone with your good angel in an open plain, as was Tobit on his way to Rages. Suppose the Angel to set before you Paradise, full of delights and joys; and on the other hand Hell, with all its torments. Contemplate both, kneeling in imagination before your guardian Angel. Consider that you are most truly standing between Hell and Paradise, and that both the one and the other are open to receive you, according to your own choice.

2. Consider that the choice you make in this life will last for ever in the next.

3. Consider too, that while both are open to receive you according to your choice, yet God, Who is prepared to give the one by reason of His Justice, the other by reason of His Mercy, all the while desires unspeakably that you should select Paradise; and your good Angel is urging you with all his might to do so, offering you countless graces on God's part, countless helps to attain to it.

4. Consider that Jesus Christ, enthroned in Heaven, looks down upon you in loving invitation: O beloved one, come unto Me, and joy for ever in the eternal blessedness of My Love! Behold His mother yearning over you with maternal tenderness, Courage, my child, do not despise the Goodness of my Son, or my earnest prayers for thy salvation. Behold the Saints, who have left you their example, the millions of holy souls who long after you, desiring earnestly that you may one day be for ever joined to them in their song of praise, urging upon you that the road to Heaven is not so hard to find as the world would have you think. Press on boldly, dear friend, they cry. Whoso will ponder well the path by which we came hither, will discover that we attained to these present delights by sweeter joys than any this world can give.

The Choice

1. O Hell, I abhor thee now and for ever; I abhor thy griefs and torments, thine endless misery, the unceasing blasphemies and maledictions which thou pourest out upon my God; and turning to thee, O blessed Paradise, eternal glory, unfading happiness, I choose thee for ever as my abode, thy glorious mansions, thy precious and abiding tabernacles. O my God, I bless Thy Mercy which gives me the power to choose, O Jesus, Saviour, I accept Thine Eternal Love, and praise Thee for the promise Thou hast given me of a place prepared for me in that blessed New Jerusalem, where I shall love and bless Thee for ever.

2. Dwell lovingly upon the example set before you by the Blessed Virgin and the Saints, and strive to follow where they point you. Give yourself up to your guardian Angel, that he may be your guide, and gird up your courage anew to make this choice.

Return to the Eight Meditation . . . *Proceed to the Tenth Meditation*

Saints' Prayers

selected from the annals of history unto our current day

Meditations

The Spiritual Meditations of St. Francis de Sales

from the book, 'Introduction to the Devout Life'
first written for St. Jane Frances de Chantal and now offered to all

TENTH MEDITATION

How the Soul chooses the Devout Life

Preparation

1. PLACE yourself in the Presence of God. 2. Humble yourself before Him, and ask His Aid.

Considerations

1. Once more imagine yourself in an open plain, alone with your guardian Angel, and represent to yourself on the left hand the Devil sitting on a high and mighty throne, surrounded by a vast troop of worldly men, who bow bareheaded before him, doing homage to him by the various sins they commit. Study the countenances of the miserable courtiers of that

most abominable king: some raging with fury, envy and passion, some murderous in their hatred; others pale and haggard in their craving after wealth, or madly pursuing every vain and profitless pleasure; others sunk and lost in vile, impure affections. See how all alike are hateful, restless, wild: see how they despise one another, and only pretend to an unreal self-seeking love. Such is the miserable reign of the abhorred Tyrant.

2. On the other hand, behold Jesus Christ Crucified, calling these unhappy wretches to come to Him, and interceding for them with all the Love of His Precious Heart. Behold the company of devout souls and their guardian Angels, contemplate the beauty of this religious Kingdom. What lovelier than the troop of virgin souls, men and women, pure as lilies: widows in their holy desolation and humility; husbands and wives living in all tender love and mutual cherishing. See how such pious souls know how to combine their exterior and interior duties; to love the earthly spouse without diminishing their devotion to the Heavenly Bridegroom. Look around, one and all you will see them with loving, holy, gentle countenances listening to the Voice of their Lord, all seeking to enthrone Him more and more within their hearts.

They rejoice, but it is with a peaceful, loving, sober joy; they love, but their love is altogether holy and pure. Such among these devout ones as have sorrows to bear, are not disheartened thereby, and do not grieve overmuch, for their Saviour's Eye is upon them to comfort them, and they all seek Him only.

3. Surely you have altogether renounced Satan with his weary miserable troop, by the good resolutions you have made; but nevertheless you have not yet wholly attained to the King Jesus, or altogether joined His blessed company of devout ones: you have hovered betwixt the two.

4. The Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph, St. Louis, St. Monica, and hundreds of thousands more who were once like you, living in the world, call upon you and encourage you.

5. The Crucified King Himself calls you by your own name: Come, O my beloved, come, and let Me crown thee!

The Choice

1. O world, O vile company, never will I enlist beneath thy banner; for ever I have forsaken thy flatteries and deceptions. O proud king,

monarch of evil, infernal spirit, I renounce thee and all thy hollow pomp, I detest thee and all thy works.

2. And turning to Thee, O Sweet Jesus, King of blessedness and of eternal glory, I cleave to Thee with all the powers of my soul, I adore Thee with all my heart, I choose Thee now and ever for my King, and with inviolable fidelity I would offer my irrevocable service, and submit myself to Thy holy laws and ordinances.

3. O Blessed Virgin Mother of God, you shall be my example, I will follow you with all reverence and respect.

O my good Angel, bring me to this heavenly company, leave me not until I have reached them, with whom I will sing for ever, in testimony of my choice, Glory be to Jesus, my Lord!

Return to the Ninth Meditation

Saints' Prayers

selected from the annals of history unto our current day

Meditations

Considerations by St. Alphonsus Maria de Liguori

from the book, 'Preparation for Death'

CONSIDERATION I

Description of one who has Departed this Life

"Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt them return." Gen. iii. 19.

FIRST POINT

CONSIDER that thou art dust, and unto dust thou must return. The day will come when thou must die, and be placed in a grave where "the worms" shall "cover thee." (Isa. xiv. n.) The same fate awaits all, both nobles and plebeians, both princes and vassals. Directly the soul shall leave the body, with the last gasp, it will go into eternity, and the body will return to its dust. "When Thou takest away their breath they die, and are turned again to their dust." (Ps. civ. 29.)

Imagine to yourself a person, whose soul has just departed. Behold that pale corpse, which is still upon the bed, the head fallen upon the breast; the hair dishevelled and bathed in the sweat of death; the eyes sunken; the cheeks hollow; the face of ashy paleness; the tongue and the lips of a leaden hue; the body cold and heavy. Those who see it grow pale and tremble. How many there are who, upon seeing a relation or friend in this condition, have changed their life, and have left the world!

But still more dreadful is it when the body begins to decay. A few hours or days will hardly have passed ere it will become offensive. The windows will have to be opened; incense will have to be burned nay, it must be sent in haste to the church to be buried, that the whole house be not infected. Behold to what that proud, that voluptuous man is reduced? In life he was the favourite, the one who was sought after in society; now he makes all those who look upon him shudder. His relations hasten to have him removed from the house, and men are hired to bear him, shut up in a coffin, to his grave. He was once famous for his great talent for his great politeness for his courteous behaviour, and for his facetiousness; but now that he is dead, his memory will soon pass away, "their memorial is perished with them." (Ps. ix. 6.)

Upon hearing the news of his death, some people say he was of great dignity others, that he left his family well-provided for; some grieve because he had done them good, and others rejoice because they derive some benefit from his death. Within a short time, however, he is spoken of by no one. And his nearest relations, even from the hour of his death, will not hear him mentioned, lest their grief should be renewed.

When the visits of condolence are made, other things form the subject of conversation; and if any one by chance alludes to the departed one, the relations immediately exclaim, "In kindness, do not mention him to me." You must consider that what you have done at the death of your friends and relations, others will do at your death. Those who are living, enter upon the stage of life, to occupy the wealth and the position of the dead,

and little or no esteem is paid to the dead, and very little mention is ever made of them. Your relations will at first mourn for you for some days, but they will soon be consoled with that share of property which will fall to them, so that they will shortly rejoice because of your death, and in the same room in which your soul has gone forth, to be judged by Jesus Christ, they will dance and eat, laugh and play, as they did before; and your soul, where will it be then?

Affections and Prayers

Jesus, my Redeemer, I thank Thee that Thou didst not let me die when I was in disgrace with Thee. During how many of the past years have I not deserved to be cast into hell? If I had died on such a day, or on such a night, what would have become of me for all eternity? I thank Thee for this, O my God. I accept my death as a satisfaction for my sins; and I accept it in whatever manner it may please Thee to send it to me. But since Thou hast waited for me until now, wait for me yet a little longer. "Let me alone, that I may take comfort a little." (Job x. 20.) Give me time to weep over the offences which I have committed against Thee, before Thou comest to judge me.

I will no longer resist Thy sweet voice that calls me. Perhaps these words which I have just read may be the last call for me. I confess that I do not deserve pity, for Thou hast so often pardoned me; and I, ungrateful one that I am, have again offended Thee; but "a broken and contrite heart, O God, shalt Thou not despise." (Ps. li. 17.) O Lord, since Thou wilt not despise a broken and contrite heart, look upon a traitor, who being repentant, flees unto Thee. "Cast me not away from Thy presence." (Ps. li. 1 1.) In mercy, do not cast me from Thee, for Thou hast said, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." (St. John vi. 37.) It is true that I have offended Thee more than many others, because I have been favoured by Thee with light and grace; but the blood which Thou hast shed for me gives me courage, and gives me pardon, if only I repent. Yes, O my Sovereign Good, I do repent with my whole heart for having despised Thee. Pardon me, and give me grace to love Thee for the tune to come. I have offended Thee too many times already. I will not spend the life that remains to me, O my Jesus, in giving Thee offence, but I will spend it ever weeping over the displeasure I have caused Thee, and in loving Thee with all my heart, Thou, O God, who art so worthy of infinite love.

SECOND POINT

In order more clearly to see what indeed thou art, my Christian soul, St. John Chrysostom observes, "Go to a sepulchre, contemplate dust, ashes, worms, and sigh." See how that corpse becomes at first yellow, and then black. Afterwards there is seen upon the body a white and unpleasant mould. Then there issues forth a foul and corrupt matter, which sinks into the ground. In that corruption many worms are generated, which feed upon the flesh. The rats then come to feast upon the body, some on the outside, others entering into the mouth and bowels. The cheeks, the lips, and the hair fall in pieces; the ribs are the first to become bare of flesh, then the arms and the legs. The worms after having consumed the flesh eat each other, and, in the end, nothing remains of that body but a fetid skeleton, which, in course of time, is divided, the bones being separated, and the head falling from the body: they "become like the chaff of the summer threshing-floors, and the wind carried them away.' (Dan. ii. 35.) Behold, then, what man is a little dust upon a threshing-floor, which is carried away by the wind. Behold that nobleman, who was considered to be the life and soul of society, where is he? Go into his room, he is not there; if you look into his bed, it belongs to another; his clothes, his arms, others have already taken and divided them. If you wish to see him, you must seek for him in that grave where he is changed into all that is unpleasant, and into fleshless bones. O my God, that that body fed with so many delicacies, clothed with so much pomp, attended by so many servants, should be reduced to this! O ye saints, ye, who for the love of that God whom ye loved alone, upon this earth, knew how to mortify your bodies; and now your bones are kept and prized as sacred relics in golden shrines; and your souls which are beatified, rejoice in the presence of God, waiting for the final Day, when your bodies even, will again become the companions of your souls in glory, as they were once the companions of your souls, in bearing the cross of this world. This is the true love of the body, so to burden it with mortifications here, that it may be happy in eternity; and to deny it those pleasures here which would render it unhappy in eternity.

Affections and Prayers

Behold, therefore, O my God, to what my body will become reduced, through which I have so often offended Thee, it will be reduced even to worms and corruption. But this does not grieve me, O my God, nay, it rather cheers me, for this my flesh to become putrid and consumed, which made me lose Thee, O my Sovereign Good. But it does grieve me very much, to think that I should have taken so much delight in those wretched pleasures which have so often displeased Thee. But I will not distrust Thy mercy. Thou hast waited for me to give me pardon.

"Therefore will the Lord wait that He may be gracious unto you." (Isa. xxx. 18.) And Thou wilt pardon me if I repent. Yes, Thou wilt, for I do repent with all my heart for having despised Thee, O God of infinite goodness. I will repeat to Thee as did St. Catherine of Genoa, "No more sins, my Jesus, no more sins." No, I will no longer abuse Thy patience; neither will I wait to embrace Thee until the hour of death. O my Crucified Love, now will I embrace Thee, now will I commend my soul into Thy keeping.

"Into Thy hands I commend my spirit." My soul has been many years in this world without loving Thee; give me light and strength to love Thee during the life that remains to me. I will not wait until the hour of death to love Thee; from this moment, I will love Thee, and embrace Thee, and unite myself to Thee, and I promise never more to leave Thee.

THIRD POINT

My brother, in this description of death, thou seest thyself, and that, which one day thou wilt be, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." Reflect, for in a few years, nay, perhaps in a few months, and even days, thou wilt become a mass of corruption and worms. By thinking upon this, Job became a saint, "I have said to corruption, Thou art my father, to the worm, Thou art my brother and sister." (Job xvii. 14.) Everything must have an end; and if, when the hour of death arrives, thy soul is lost, everything will be lost for thee. St. Lawrence Justinian says, "Consider thyself as dead already, since thou knowest thou must die. If now the hour of thy death were approaching, what is there of good, that thou wouldst not like to have done? Now, that thou art living, reflect, that one day thou must die. Bonaventure observes, that in order to guide the vessel aright, the pilot must place himself at the helm: even so must a man, if he wishes to lead a holy life, reflect that death is ever nigh. Therefore, S. Bernard observes, "Look upon the sins of youth, and blush; look on the sins of manhood and weep; look upon the present evil habits of thy life, and tremble, and hasten to make amends."

When Camillus de Lellis beheld the graves of the dead, he said within himself, "If all these dead bodies could come back again to life, what would they not do to gain eternal life? and I, who have now the opportunity what am I doing for my soul?" Yet it was humility on the part of this saint which caused him to say this. But perhaps, my brother, thou mightst with reason fear, lest thou shouldst be like that barren fig-tree, concerning which our blessed Lord said, "Behold these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none." (St. Luke xiii. 7.) Thou,

who for many more years than three hast been living in this world, what fruit hast thou yielded? Take care, remarks St. Bernard, for the Lord does not require flowers only, but seeks for fruit also; that is to say, not only good desires and resolutions, but also good works. Therefore, take care to make good use of the time which God in His mercy grants to you; do not wait until the "tune shall be no longer" to desire to do good when it shall be said unto you: "Time shall be no longer, depart."

Make haste, it is now almost time to leave the world; make haste, what is done, is done.

Affections and Prayers

Look upon me, O my God, for I am that tree which for so many years deserved to hear these words, "Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?" (St. Luke xiii. 7;) yes, because during the many years that I have been in the world, I have yielded no either fruit than the briars and thorns of sin. But Thou, O Lord, dost not wish me to despair. Thou hast said to all those that seek Thee, that they shall find Thee. "Seek and ye shall find." I do seek Thee, my God, and I do desire Thy grace. I am indeed sorry for all the sins I have committed against Thee. I would grieve even to death because of them. During the past years, I have often fled from Thee; but now I value Thy friendship more than all the kingdoms of the world. I will no longer resist Thy calls. Thou dost wish me to be Thine alone. I yield myself wholly to Thee, without any reserve. Thou didst give Thyself entirely for me, upon the Cross; now I give myself entirely to Thee. Thou hast said: "If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it." (St. John xiv. 14.) My Jesus, I trust in this Thy great promise, and in Thy name; and through Thy merits I seek of Thee Thy grace and Thy holy love. Let Thy grace and Thy most holy love abound in my soul, where sin did once abound. I thank Thee greatly, for having given me the Spirit to make this prayer to Thee. Whilst Thou dost inspire me to pray, it is a sign that Thou wilt graciously hear me. Hear me, O my Jesus, and give me a great love towards Thee, and give me a great desire to please Thee, and then the strength to follow the desire.

Proceed to the Second Meditation

selected from the annals of history unto our current day

Meditations

Considerations by St. Alphonsus Maria de Liguori

from the book, 'Preparation for Death'

CONSIDERATION II

All Ends with Death

"An end, the end is come." Ezek. vii. 2.

FIRST POINT

BY the worldly, those only are considered happy who enjoy the things of this world, its pleasures, its riches, its pomps; but death puts an end to all these joys of earth, "For what is your life? it is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time." (S. James iv. 14.) The vapours which arise from the earth, sometimes when raised in the air and clothed with the light of the sun, cause a beautiful appearance; but how long does it last? It vanishes with a little wind. Behold that great man, who to-day is courted, feared, and almost adored; to-morrow, when he is dead, he will be despised, reviled, and scorned. When death comes, all must be left. The brother of that great servant of God, Thomas a Kempis, boasted of having made a beautiful house; but a friend told him one day that there was one great defect. What is it? he demanded. "The defect," replied the other, "is, that you have had a door made in it." "Indeed!" exclaimed he; "is the door a defect?" "Yes," replied the friend, "because one day you will have to be carried out of that door dead, and thus will you have to leave your house and all that is in it."

Death, in short, despoils man of all the things in this world. What a sad sight it is to see a prince carried forth from his palace, never more to enter it, and to see others take possession of his furniture, his money, and of all his other goods! He is left in the grave with a garment on that will scarcely cover his body. There is no one now to prize and to flatter

him; neither are there any who take account of his last commands. Saladin, who acquired many kingdoms in Asia, when dying, said, that when his body was taken to be buried, a man should go before it, with his shirt suspended to a pole, crying, "This is all that Saladin carries to the grave." When the body of that prince is shut up in the grave, the flesh will soon fall off, and his skeleton will no longer be distinguished from other skeletons. St. Basil crys, "Contemplate the sepulchre, and see whether you can distinguish who was the servant and who was the lord."

Diogenes was one day observed by Alexander the Great to be anxiously seeking for something amidst certain skulls. "What dost thou seek?" inquired Alexander, with curiosity. "I am seeking," he replied, "the skull of thy father, King Philip, and I cannot distinguish it; if thou canst find it, show it to me." In this world, men are born of unequal rank, but after death all will be equal, observes Seneca. And Horace said, that death makes the spade equal to the sceptre. Finally, when - death comes, "the end comes;" everything is ended, and everything must be left, and nothing is taken to the grave, of all the things of this world.

Affections and Prayers

Since, my dear Lord, Thou dost grant me understanding to know, that all that the world esteems, is but vanity and foolishness, give me strength to leave all its allurements before death may come to snatch me from them. Alas! wretched me, how often, because of the miserable pleasures and possessions of this world, have I not offended, and lost Thee. O Thou Infinite Good, O my Jesus, O my Heavenly Physician, look upon my poor miserable soul, and upon the heavy wounds I have made with my sins, and do Thou have mercy upon me. "If Thou wilt Thou canst make me clean." I know Thou wilt make me clean; but in order to cleanse me, Thou desirest that I should repent of all the injuries I have done Thee. I do indeed repent of them with my whole heart; heal me, therefore, now that Thou canst do so. "Heal my soul, for I have sinned against Thee." (Ps. xli. 4.) I have often been forgetful of Thee, but Thou hast never been forgetful of me; and now make me feel that Thou wilt also forget those offences which I have committed against Thee, if only I abhor them. "If the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed . . . he shall surely live, he shall not die." (Ezek. xyiii. 21.) I do, indeed, detest them, and hate them above every other evil. Forget Thou, O my Redeemer, the sins I have committed against Thee. In future, I would rather lose all, even life itself, than Thy grace. And of what use are all the world's treasures to me without Thy grace? Ah, help me! for Thou knowest how weak I am. Satan will never cease to tempt me; he is now preparing to

assault, me, in order to make me his slave once more. No, my Jesus, I know Thou wilt not abandon me. I wish to be the slave of Thy love from this day forth. Thou alone art my Lord; Thou hast created me, Thou hast redeemed me, Thou hast loved me beyond all others; Thou alone deservest to be loved; Thee only will I love.

SECOND POINT

Philip II, King of Spain, being near death, called his son to him, and casting aside his royal robe, and showing him his breast, which was all gnawed by worms, said to him, "Prince, see how we die, and see how all the grandeur of this world is finished." Theodoret spoke truly when he said, that " death fears neither riches nor guards, nor the purple; rottenness follows, and health fails." So that every one who dies, although he may be a prince, takes nothing with him to the grave; all the glory remains upon the bed where he died. "For he shall carry nothing away with him when he dieth: neither shall his pomp follow him." (Ps. xlix. 17.)

St. Antoninus relates, that when Alexander the Great was dead, a certain philosopher, exclaiming, said, "Behold he who was treading upon the earth yesterday, now by that same earth is possessed. Yesterday, the whole earth was not enough for him, now, he lies in about seven spans thereof. Yesterday, he conducted his armies over the earth, and now he is taken by a few men to be put under the earth." But rather let us listen to God, when He says: "Why is earth and ashes proud?" (Ecclus. x. 9.) Man, dost thou not see, that thou art nothing but dust and ashes; and of what, therefore, art thou proud? Why, therefore, dost thou spend thy years, and thy thoughts, in seeking to make thyself great in this world? Death will soon come, and then all thy grandeur will come to an end, and also all thy designs. "And then all his thoughts perish." (Ps. cxlvi. 3.)

Oh how much happier was the death of St. Paul the hermit, who lived sixty years shut up in a cave, than the death of Nero, who was emperor of Rome? How much happier was the death of Felix, a Capuchin lay brother, than the death of Henry VIII, who lived in royal splendour, but who was the enemy of God? But we must consider, that these holy men, in order to die such a happy death, gave up everything their country, the hopes and pleasures which the world offered them; and they embraced a life which was poor and despised. They buried their lives in this world, so that they might not be buried when dead, in hell. But how can the worldly, who are living in sin in worldly pleasure, in dangerous occasions how can they, I repeat, hope to die a happy death? God now threatens those who are live

in sin, that when they are on the bed of death they will seek Him, but they will not find Him. "Ye shall seek me and shall not find me." (St. John vii. 34.) God says, that that will be the time for vengeance, but not for mercy. "To me belongeth vengeance and recompence." (Deut. xxxii. 35.) Reason tells us the same; for at the hour of death, a worldly man will find his mind fail him; his heart dark and hardened, because of his evil habits: his temptations will be very strong; how can he, who in life has been wont to yield to sin and to let sin conquer him how can such an one, I say, ever expect to be able to resist temptation at the hour of death? An all-powerful Divine grace is then needed to change his heart; but will God give him this Divine grace? Has he deserved it, during the unholy life he has led? And does he deserve it now, that he is dying? And yet this is a question concerning his eternal happiness or his eternal misery. How is it then that he who thinks upon this, and believes in the truths of faith, does not give up everything, so as to give himself entirely to God, who, according to our works, so will He judge us?

Affections and Prayers

Ah, Lord, how many nights have I, wretched one that I am, laid me down to sleep at enmity with Thee? O God, what a wretched state was my soul then in! It was hated by Thee, and it did not mind Thy hatred. Once I was condemned to hell, the sentence only remained to be executed. But Thou, my God, hast never ceased to seek me, and to invite me to pardon. But who is it who can assure me that I am pardoned now? Must I live, my Jesus, in this fear until the time shall come for me to be judged? But the grief that I feel at having offended Thee; the desire which I have to love Thee; and much more, Thy great compassion, my loved Redeemer; make me hope to remain in Thy blessed favour. I am very sorry for having offended Thee, O Thou Sovereign Good, and I love Thee beyond all things. I have resolved to lose all rather than lose Thy grace and Thy holy love. Thou desirest that heart which seeks Thee to rejoice. "Let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord." (i Chron. xvi. 10.) O Lord, I detest my offences against Thee; give me courage and confidence; do not reproach me with my ingratitude, for I am very conscious of it; I detest it. Thou hast said, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." (Ezek. xxxiii. 1 1.) Yes, my God, I will leave all and be converted to Thee. I seek Thee; I desire Thee; and I love Thee more than all things. Give me Thy holy love, and I ask for nothing more.

THIRD POINT

David likened the happiness of this present life to a dream, - when one awakens. "Yea even like as a dream, when one awaketh." (Ps. Ixxiii. 19.) A certain author observes, "In a dream the senses being at rest, great things appear, and are not, and quickly vanish away." The goods of this world appear great, but in truth they are nothing; like sleep, they last but a short time, and then they all vanish away. This thought namely, that all things end with death made St. Francis Borgia give himself up entirely to God. This saint was obliged to accompany the body of the Empress Isabella to Granada. When the coffin was opened, all those present fled, because of the dreadful sight and smell; but S. Francis, led by Divine light, remained to contemplate, in that body, the vanity of the world; and looking upon it, he said, "Art thou then my empress? Art thou that great one to whom so many great ones bowed the knee? O my mistress, Isabella, where is now thy majesty and thy beauty?" " Even thus," he concluded within himself, "do the grandeurs and the crowns of this world end. From this day forward I will therefore serve a Master Who can never die!" Therefore, from that time he gave himself entirely to the love of Jesus crucified; and then he formed this resolution, that if his wife should die he would become a religious, which resolution he afterwards fulfilled by entering the Society of Jesus. Truly, then, did one disabused of the world write these words on a skull: Cogitanti vilescunt omnia. It is impossible for him who thinks upon death to love the world, and therefore are there so many unhappy lovers of this world; because they do not think upon death." O ye sons of men, how long will ye blaspheme mine honour: and have such pleasure in vanity, and seek after leasing?" (Ps. iv. 2.) O miserable children of Adam, the Holy Spirit warns us; why therefore do you not drive away from your hearts that affection for the world which causes you to love vanity and deceit? That which happened to your forefathers will one day happen to you; they, at one time were living in the same houses, and many slept upon the same beds that you do now but now they are no more: the same will happen to you.

Therefore, my brother, give thyself now to God, before death shall come to Thee. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." (Eccles. ix. 10.) Whatsoever thou canst do to-day do it, and wait not until to-morrow, because this day will pass away, and will never return, and to-morrow death might overtake you, so that you would then be able to do nothing at all. Quickly remove yourself from all that separates, or that may separate you from God. Let us now give up all our love for this world's goods, before death takes them away from us by force." Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord." (Rev. xiv. 13.) Blessed are those, who, when dying, are found dead to the affection of this world. By such as these, death is not feared it is desired, it is joyfully embraced; for

instead of separating them from all that they love, it then unites them to their Sovereign Good, Who is alone loved by them, and Who will make them blessed for evermore.

Affections and Prayers

My dear Redeemer, I indeed thank Thee for having waited for me. What would have become of me if I had died when I was far from Thee? For ever blessed be Thy mercy, and Thy patience, which Thou hast exercised towards me, during the many years that are past. I thank Thee for the light and grace with which Thou dost now assist me. At one time I did not love Thee, and then I cared little for being loved by Thee. Now I love Thee with all my heart, and now I have no greater grief, than what I feel, for having once displeased a God so gracious. This grief torments me, but the torment is sweet, because this grief gives me confidence that Thou hast indeed pardoned me. My sweet Saviour, would that I had died over and over again, rather than once even, to have given Thee offence. I tremble and fear, lest at any time I should ever again displease Thee. Ah, rather let me die a most painful death, than that I should ever again lose Thy grace. Once I was the slave of hell, but now I am Thy servant, O God of my soul. Thou hast said that Thou wilt love those who love Thee. I love them that love me. I do love Thee, therefore Thou art mine, and I am Thine. I might lose Thee at some time, but this is the grace that I seek, namely, that it would be better for me to die, than to lose Thee again. Thou hast given me so many graces that I have not; asked Thee. for, therefore I cannot fear that Thou wilt fail to grant me this grace, for which I am now asking Thee. Never again let me lose Thee; give me Thy holy love, and nothing more can I desire.

Return to the First Meditation . . . *Proceed to the Third Meditation*

Saints' Prayers

selected from the annals of history unto our current day

Meditations

Considerations by St. Alphonsus Maria de Liguori

from the book, 'Preparation for Death'

CONSIDERATION III

The Shortness of Life

"For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time." St. James iv. 14.

FIRST POINT

WHAT is your life? It is like unto a vapour, which is dispersed by a breath of wind, and is no more. All know that they must die; but the mistake that so many make is, that they imagine that death is so far off, that it will never overtake them. But no; for Job warns us that the life of man is short: "Man is of few days. . . He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down." (Job xiv. i, 2.) The Lord commanded Isaiah to preach this same truth: "Cry," He said to him, "All flesh is grass. . . The grass withereth, the flower fadeth." (Isa. xl. 6, 7.) The life of man is like the life of a blade of grass; death comes, the blade is dried up, and behold life is finished, and the flower of all grandeur and of all earthly possessions is cut-down. "My days are swifter than a post." (Job ix. 25.) Death comes; to meet us more quickly than a messenger, and we at every moment run towards death. At every step we take, at every breath we draw, we approach death. During the time I write, observes St. Jerome, I am approaching death. "For we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again." (2 Sam. xiv. 14.) Thou seest how that stream flows to the sea; and these running waters, they will never return again; thus, my brother, do thy days pass, and thou drawest near to death: so do thy pleasures pass thy amusements, pomps, praises, acclamations and what remains? "The graves are ready for me." (Job xvii. I.) We shall be cast into a grave, and there we shall have to lie deprived of everything. At the moment of death the remembrance of all the delights enjoyed in life, of all the honours we have acquired, will only serve to increase the grief and the mistrust that we shall feel as to obtaining eternal salvation. The miserable worldly one will then exclaim, Alas! my house, my gardens, that furniture, those paintings, those garments, within a short time will no longer be mine! "The graves are ready for me." Alas! for at that time no earthly possession will be

regarded except with sorrow, by him who has loved it with, such devotedness. And this grief will only serve to place the salvation of the soul in greater danger; for we know that those people who are so fond of the world, at the time of death, will only permit their infirmities, the physicians who are to be called in, and the remedies which may relieve them, to be discussed; and when the condition of their souls is spoken of, they immediately grow weary, and desire that they may be left to repose, because they have a headache, and they cannot bear the noise of conversation; and when sometimes they answer, they get confused, neither do they know what to say. Even so do those die who think but little upon death.

Affections and Prayers

Ah, my God and Lord of infinite greatness, I blush to appear before Thee. How often have I esteemed Thy friendship of less moment than a base pleasure, a passion of anger, a little earth, a vain whim, a vapour? I adore and kiss Thy holy wounds, which I, nevertheless, have inflicted on Thee by my sins, but, through which, however, I hope for pardon and salvation. Make me to feel, O my Jesus, the grievous wrong I have done Thee in leaving Thee Thou Who art the Fountain of all good to drink of waters which are putrid and poisonous. What do I now feel, because of all my many offences against Thee, except remorse of conscience and fruits for hell? "Father, . . . I am no more worthy to be called Thy son." (St. Luke xv. 21.) My Father, do not cast me from Thee. It is true that I do not deserve Thy love, that I may become Thy son; but Thou hast died to give me pardon. Thou hast said, "Turn ye unto me, . . . and I will turn unto you." (Zach. i. 3.) I leave every gratification, I renounce all the pleasures that the world can give me, and I turn to Thee. Pardon me through that Blood which Thou hast shed for me, for I repent with all my heart, for all the offences which I have done against Thee. I repent, for I love Thee beyond all other things. I am not worthy to love Thee, but Thou art indeed worthy to be loved; let me love Thee, do not turn from me, let that heart which once neglected Thee now love Thee. Thou didst not leave me to die, when I was living in sin, in order that I might come to love Thee yes, I do indeed desire to love Thee during the remainder of my life, and I would love none but Thee. Help me, give me holy perseverance, and Thy most holy love.

SECOND POINT

King Hezekiah wept and said, "I have cut off like a weaver my life; . . . from day even to night wilt Thou make an end of me." (Isa. xxxviii. 12.)

Oh! how many who are busy weaving, that is, planning and executing their worldly designs, which they have undertaken with such care, are overtaken by death, which cuts off all. At the hour of death, all the glory of everything that is worldly vanishes away, applause, amusements, pomps, and grandeur. Great secret of death! which makes us see that which the lovers of the world do not see. Fortunes which have been envied, the grandest dignities, the proudest triumphs, lose all their splendour when they are reviewed from the bed of death. The notions of certain false happiness, which we have formed in our own minds, these are changed into exceeding great indignation, against our own folly. The black and gloomy shadow of death covers and obscures all dignities even though they be royal.

Our passions, now make the things of this earth appear different from what they really are; death unveils them, and makes us see what in truth they are nothing but smoke, dust, vanity, and misery. O my God! of what avail are riches, possessions, and kingdoms in death, when nothing is needed but a coffin, and a simple robe to cover the body? Of what avail are honours, when nothing remains of them but a funeral train and a pompous burial, which will assist the soul in no way if it be lost? Of what avail is beauty, if nothing remains of it but worms, corruption, and horror, even before death, and afterwards nothing but a little foul dust?

"He hath made me also a byword of the people." (Job xvii. 6.) That rich man dies, that minister, that captain, and then he will be spoken of everywhere; if he has led a wicked life, he will become a byword of the people, and he will serve as a warning to others, being an example of the vanity of the world, and also an example of Divine justice. In the grave his ashes will be mingled with the ashes of the poor. "The small and great are there." (Job iii. 19.) Of what use has the beautiful form of his body been to him, if now he is only a mass of corruption? What has the authority he possessed availed him, if his body is now thrown into a grave to corrupt, and his soul has been cast into hell to burn? Oh! what misery to be the object of these sad reflections to others, instead of making them for his own profit. Let us, therefore, be persuaded that the proper time for satisfying the stings of a remorseful conscience, is during the time of life, and not at the hour of death. Let us hasten now to do that which at that time we shall not be able to do. "The time is short." All things quickly pass away and end therefore, let us so act, that all we do, may serve towards obtaining our eternal salvation.

Affections and Prayers

O God of my soul, O Infinite Goodness, have mercy upon me, who have so often offended Thee. I did indeed know that by sinning I should lose Thy grace, and I did not mind losing it; but teach me what I can do to regain it. If Thou desirest that I should repent of my sins, I do repent with my whole heart; I would even like to die for grief at having once sinned. If it is Thy wish that I should hope for pardon from Thee, I do truly hope for it, through the merits of Thy blood. If Thou desirest that I should love Thee above all things, I will leave all; I will renounce all the joys and the riches which the world can give me; and I will love Thee beyond all other things, O ray most adorable Saviour. If Thou willest that I should demand graces of Thee, I ask for these two that Thou wilt never let me offend Thee more, and that Thou wilt make me to love Thee, and then do with me whatsoever Thou wilt.

THIRD POINT

Therefore, is it not folly for the short and paltry pleasures of this brief life to incur the risk of dying a miserable death? and with that death to begin a wretched eternity? Oh, of how much importance is that last moment, that last gasp, that last closing of the scene! It is an eternity either of every joy, or of every pain that is at stake a life for ever happy or for ever miserable. Let us think that Jesus Christ was willing to die a bitter and cruel death, in order to obtain for us a peaceful and happy death. For this end He calls us so many tunes; He gives us so many lights; He admonishes us with so many threats, that we may be induced to spend that last moment in the grace of God.

Even the Pagan Antisthenes, when he was asked what was the greatest blessing in this world, answered, "A happy death." And what ought a Christian to say, who knows by faith, that from the moment of death, eternity begins; so that in that moment he lays hold of one of the two wheels which draws with it, either eternal happiness or eternal suffering? If there were two tickets in a lottery, upon which hell might be written on one, and heaven on the other, with what care would you not try to draw out that one, upon which Paradise was written? O God, how must those unhappy wretches tremble who are condemned to throw the die upon which their life or death depends! What fear will be yours when you will find yourself near to that last moment when you will say, "Upon this moment, which is drawing so near, depends my eternal life or death! Now, it is to be decided whether I shall be for ever blessed or for ever miserable." St. Bernardine, of Sienna, tells of a certain prince who when dying, in great terror, exclaimed, "I have many lands and palaces in this

world; but if I should die during this night, I know not what lodging will be mine."

My brother, if thou believest that thou hast to die, and that there is an eternity, and that once only thou canst die, so that if thou once makest a mistake, the mistake will be for ever without any hope of remedy why is it that thou dost not begin, from this moment in which you read these words, to do all that liest in thy power to secure for thyself a happy death? St. Andrew Avellino said tremblingly, "Who knows what will be my lot in the life to come? Whether I shall be saved or condemned to eternal death?" St. Louis Bertrand also trembled so much that he was unable to take rest because of this thought which would suggest itself to him, "Who knows whether thou wilt be lost?" And thou, who has committed so many sins, dost thou not tremble? Be quick and make amends in time; resolve to give thyself indeed to God, and begin, at least from this time, a life the remembrance of which may not grieve, but may fill thee with joy at the hour of death. Give thyself to prayer, frequent the Sacraments, quit dangerous occasions, and if necessary, leave even the world, so that thou mayest secure to thyself an eternal salvation; and understand, that to secure this eternal life no precaution can be too great.

Affections and Prayers

O my dear Saviour, how much am I not indebted to Thee! How couldst Thou bestow so many favours upon one so ungrateful; upon such a traitor as I have been to Thee? Thou hast created me, and in creating me Thou didst foresee all the offences that I should commit against Thee. Thou didst redeem me by dying for me, and even then Thou didst know of all the ingratitude I should show towards Thee. When I was placed in this world, I turned away from Thee, and thus was I dead indeed in sin, until Thou with Thy grace didst restore me to life. I was blind, and Thou didst enlighten me. I had lost Thee, and Thou didst enable me to find Thee. I was Thy enemy, and Thou didst make me Thy friend. O God of mercy, grant me to feel how deeply I am indebted to Thee, and make me mourn over my offences against Thee. Avenge Thyself upon me by making me very sorry for my sins; but do not punish me by depriving me of Thy grace and of Thy love. O Eternal Father, I detest and abhor more than any other evil, the offences I have committed against Thee. Have mercy upon me, for the love of Jesus Christ. Behold Thy Son upon the Cross. "His Blood be upon me." May that Divine Blood flow down and wash my soul. O King of my heart, "Thy kingdom come." I am resolved to drive away every affection that is not felt for Thee. I love Thee more than anything; come and reign alone in my soul. Let me love Thee, and let me

love Thee only. I would please Thee as much as it is possible for me to do; and I would give Thee entire satisfaction during the life that remains to me. Bless, O my Father, this my desire, and give me grace ever to be one with Thee. I consecrate all my affections to Thee, and from this day forward I would be Thine alone, Who art my Treasure, my Peace, my Hope, my Love, my All; and all this I hope for through the merits of Thy dear Son.

Return to the Second Meditation . . . *Proceed to the Fourth Meditation*

Saints' Prayers

selected from the annals of history unto our current day

Meditations

Considerations by St. Alphonsus Maria de Liguori

from the book, 'Preparation for Death'

CONSIDERATION IV

The Certainty of Death

It is appointed unto men once to die." Heb. ix. 27.

FIRST POINT

The sentence of death is written against all men; thou art man, thou hast to die. St. Augustine observes that "our good things and our evil things are uncertain death alone is certain." It is uncertain, whether that new-born infant will be poor or rich, whether it will have good or bad health, whether it will die young or old but it is quite certain that it will have to die. Every noble, every monarch, will be cut off by death. And when death arrives, there is no strength able to resist it. Fire may be resisted,

water may be resisted, the sword may be resisted, the power of princes may be resisted, but when death comes there is no power able to resist that. Belluacensis relates that a certain king of France whose last moment was fast approaching, exclaimed, "Behold that I, with all my power, am unable to make death wait one more hour for me!" When the end of life is indeed come, not even for one moment can it be deferred. "Thou hast appointed his bounds, that he cannot pass." (Job xiv. 5.)

Should you therefore live, dear reader, for all the years that you hope to, still one day must come, and one hour of that day, which will be the last for you. For me who am now writing, and for you who will read this little book, there is a day, and there is a moment decreed, in which I shall no longer write, neither will you read." What man is he that liveth and shall not see death?" (Ps. cxxxix. 47.) The sentence is passed. There has never been a man so foolish as to flatter himself he will not have to die. That which happened to your ancestors will also happen to you. Of all those, who, at the beginning of the last century were living in your country, behold not one of them remains. Even these princes, the kings of the world, have passed away; nothing remains of them but a marble mausoleum with a grand inscription, which now serves to warn us that a little dust confined within the tomb is all that remains of the grand ones of this world. St. Bernard asks, "Tell me where are the lovers of the world?" and he replies, "Nothing remains of them save ashes and worms." Therefore, we must endeavour to obtain, not that happiness which has an end, but that which is eternal, for our souls are eternal; for of what use would it be to be happy, (even were it possible for true happiness to be felt by that soul which is at enmity with God) I repeat, to be happy in this life, if in the life to come you must be unhappy for all eternity? You have built that house to your satisfaction, but you must reflect and think, that soon you will have to leave it, to remain corrupting in a tomb. You have obtained that dignity which renders you superior to others; but death will soon come, and will make you lower than the lowest peasant on the earth.

Affections and Prayers

Alas, wretched one that I am, who for so many years have only offended Thee, O God of my soul. Alas, that those years have already passed away, and perchance death is drawing nigh, and I feel my conscience troubled and filled with remorse. Oh, that I had ever served Thee my Lord! How foolish have I not been, to have lived so many years, and instead of trying to fit myself for the other world, I have laden myself with debts to the Divine Justice. My dear Redeemer, give me light and strength now to

make my reckoning sure with Thee. Death for me, perhaps, now stands nigh at hand. I should like to prepare myself for that great moment in which my everlasting happiness, or unhappiness depends. I thank Thee for having waited so long for me; and since Thou dost give me time to atone for what I have done amiss, look upon me, O my God, and tell me what I must do for Thee. Dost Thou wish me to grieve over the offences. I have committed against Thee? I do grieve over them they do displease me very much indeed. Dost Thou wish me to spend the years and days which may remain to me, in loving Thee? Yes; then I will do so. O God, during the years that are past, many times have I desired to do this, but my desires have afterwards proved failures. No, my Jesus, I will no longer be ungrateful for the many favours Thou hast bestowed upon me. If now, at least, I do not try to love Thee, how shall I be able when the hour of death approaches to hope for pardon in Paradise? Behold now I do really firmly resolve to place myself in Thy service. But Thou must give me strength, Thou must not abandon me. But Thou didst not abandon me when I offended Thee, therefore do I indeed greatly hope for Thy gracious assistance, now that I have resolved to leave all, in order to please Thee. Accept me, therefore, and love me, O God, Thou who art worthy of infinite love. Accept the traitor, who being now repentant, embraces Thy feet, and loves Thee, and asks Thee for mercy. I love Thee, O my Jesus, I love Thee with all my heart, I love Thee much more than I love myself. Behold I am Thine alone. Dispose of me, and all that is mine, as ft may please Thee; give me perseverance in obeying Thee; give me Thy love, and then do with me as Thou wilt.

SECOND POINT

"It is appointed." It is, therefore, quite certain that we are all condemned to die. St. Cyprian says that we are all born with the halter round our neck, and we approach nearer to death at every step we take. My brother, as your name has one day been entered in the register of baptism, so it will one day be entered in the register of deaths. As you now speak of your forefathers, even so will your descendants speak of you. As you have often heard the death-bell toll for others, even so will others hear it toll for you.

But what would you say, if you were to see a condemned man going to the scaffold jesting, laughing, looking about him, thinking only of plays, festivities, and amusements? And are not you advancing on the road to death? And of what are you thinking ? Look into that grave, and see your friends and your relations upon whom justice has already been executed. What fear do those feel who are condemned to die, when they behold

their companions suspended on the gallows, and dead! Behold, then, those corpses, each one of which repeats to you, "Yesterday for me, and to-day for thee." (Ecclus. xxxviii. 23.) The portraits of those of your friends even, say the same to you, as do their memoranda-books, their houses, their beds, and even the clothes they have left behind them.

What greater folly, therefore, can there be than to know we must die, and that after death an eternity of joy or an eternity of pain awaits us; to know that upon that moment our eternal happiness or our eternal unhappiness depends, and yet not to care to make our reckoning sure, and to use all the means we can, to make our death a happy one. We pity all these who die suddenly, and who are not prepared for death; and why, therefore, do we not strive to be ever prepared to die, because the same sudden death may happen to us? But sooner or later, either with warning or without it whether we think it or whether we do not think it, we shall have to die; and at every hour, at every moment, we approach nearer to our gallows even to that last illness, which will be the cause of our death.

At every age the houses, the streets, and the cities, are again inhabited by fresh people, and the old inhabitants are borne to the grave their last resting-place. As the days of life are for ever finished for these, so will the time come in which neither I nor you, nor any of those who are now living, will be any more living upon this earth. Our "memorial is perished with us." (Ps. ix. 6.) We shall all then be living in eternity, which will be for us either an eternity of endless joy, or an eternity of endless woe. There is no middle way; this is certain, and is an article of faith that either one lot or the other will be ours.

Affections and Prayers

My beloved Redeemer, I should not have the courage thus to appear before Thee, did I not behold Thee hanging upon that Cross, wounded, derided, and dead for me. My ingratitude has been great, but Thy mercy has been still greater. My sins have been very great, but Thy merits are greater. Thy wounds, Thy blood, Thy death, are my hope. I deserved hell from the moment I committed my first sin; how many times afterwards have I not again offended Thee; and not only hast Thou preserved my life, but with so much pity and so much love, Thou hast offered me pardon and peace; how, therefore, can I fear being driven from Thee, now that I love Thee, and now that I have no other desire than Thy blessed favour. Yes, I love Thee with all my heart, my dearest Lord, and I desire nothing else than to love Thee. I love Thee, and am very sorry for having scorned Thee, not so much because I have rendered myself worthy of hell, as for

having offended Thee, my God. Who hast loved me so much. Take me to Thy bosom, O my Jesus, and add mercy to mercy. Let me never more be ungrateful to Thee, and change my heart entirely. Grant that my heart, which at one time esteemed Thy love of no account, and which has so often exchanged it for the miserable gratifications of this world, may be wholly Thine; and grant that it may burn in continual flames of love for Thee. I hope to come to Paradise, there to love Thee for ever; I cannot hope for a place there, among the innocent; my place will be amongst the penitent; but amidst those I will love Thee more than the innocent. For the glory of Thy name, let a sinner be seen by heaven to burn with a great love for Thee a sinner who has so often offended Thee. I resolve, from this day forward, to be Thine only, and to think of nothing but of loving Thee. Assist me with Thy light and with Thy grace, that strength may be given to me to fulfil this my desire, which Thou Thyself hast given me through Thy love.

THIRD POINT

Death is certain. But, O God, many Christians already know this; they believe it, they see it; how then can they live so forgetful of death as if they would never. have to die? If after this life there were neither a heaven nor a hell, could they think less of it than they do now? And it is on this account that they lead such wicked lives. My brother, if you wish to lead a proper life, endeavour to live during the days which may remain to thee, keeping death ever in view. "O death, thy judgment is good." (Ecclus. xli. 3.) Oh how well does he who judges of things and regulates his actions act; who judges and regulates them, with death ever in view. The memory of death makes us lose the affection which we feel for things that are earthly. "Let the end of this life be thought upon, and there will be nothing in this world to be loved," observes St. Lawrence Justinian. "For all that is in the world: the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." (i St. John ii. 16.) All the pleasures of the world may be reduced to the pleasures of sense, the pleasures of riches and honours; but he who thinks that within a short time he will be reduced to ashes, and that he will be food for worms under the earth, despises all the pleasures the world can give him.

And the saints, indeed, who have kept death ever in view, have despised all the goods of this world. To keep death ever in view, St. Charles Borromeo kept a skull upon a little table, so that he might continually contemplate it. Cardinal Baronius had these words inscribed upon his ring: "Remember death!" The Venerable Father Juvenal Ancina, Bishop of Saluzzo, had this motto written on a skull, "What thou art I was once;

what I am thou wilt be." Another saint, a hermit, being asked when dying why he was so rejoiced, answered, "I have kept death ever before my eyes, and therefore, now that it is come, I see nothing new in it."

What folly would it not be for a traveller, if when travelling, he were only to think of making himself great in that country through which he only has to pass, without minding the being reduced to live miserably in that country where he will have to spend his whole life? And is he not foolish, who seeks his happiness in this world, where he has to remain but a few days, and who by so doing, runs the risk of being unhappy in the world to come, where he will have to remain for ever?

He who possesses anything that is borrowed does not place his affections on it, knowing, as he does, that within a short time he will have to restore it. All the goods of this world are but given to us as a loan; it is indeed foolish to place our affections on them, being obliged within so short a time to leave them. Death will come and deprive us of all. All the gains and the riches of this world will end in a dying gasp, a funeral, and a descent into the grave. The house which you have built, within a short time you will have to give up to some one else. The tomb will be the place where your body will have to dwell until the day of judgment, and from the tomb your body will have to pass either to heaven or to hell, whither your soul will have gone before.

Affections and Prayers

Therefore, will all be finished for me in death? I shall find nothing else, O my God, than that little which I have done through my love for Thee. And what am I waiting for? Am I waiting until death shall come and find me miserable and defiled with sin as I am now? If I were now to die, I should die restlessly, and should be very dissatisfied with my past life. No, my Jesus, I do not wish to die so dissatisfied. I thank Thee that Thou hast given me time to mourn over my sins, and to love Thee. I will begin from this moment. But, above all things, I grieve for having offended Thee, O my Sovereign Good; but I love Thee more than anything, more than my life itself. I yield myself entirely to Thee; my Jesus, from this hour I attach myself wholly to Thee. I would press Thee to my heart; and from this moment I deliver my soul into Thy keeping. "Into Thy hands I commend my spirit." I will not wait to give my soul into Thy keeping until the time shall come when it shall be commanded to leave this world with that summons, "Go forth, Christian soul." I will not wait until that moment arrives to beg Thee to save me. "O Jesus, be a Jesus to me." Save me now, O my Saviour, by giving me Thy pardon, and by giving me the grace of

Thy holy love. If this consideration which I have this day read should be the last warning which Thou shouldst give me, and the last mercy thou shouldst show me, then stretch forth Thy hand and take from me all my indifference; give me fervour; grant that I may obey Thee with great love in all that Thou mayst require of me. Eternal Father, for the love of Jesus Christ give me holy perseverance, and the grace to love Thee, and to love Thee, and Thee only, during the life that may yet remain to me.

Return to the Third Meditation . . . *Proceed to the Fifth Meditation*

Saints' Prayers

selected from the annals of history unto our current day

Meditations

Considerations by St. Alphonsus Maria de Liguori

from the book, 'Preparation for Death'

CONSIDERATION V

The Uncertainty of the Hour of Death

"Be ye therefore ready also : for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not." St. Luke xii. 40.

FIRST POINT

It is certain that we must all die, but it is uncertain when. The author, who styles himself Idiota, observes, "Nothing is more certain than death, but nothing is more uncertain than the hour of death."

My brother, already is the year, the month, the day, the hour, and even the moment fixed, in which both you and I will have to leave this earth,

and to enter upon eternity; but this time is not known by us. Therefore, that we may ever be prepared, the Apostle tells us that death will come "as a thief in the night." (i Thess. v. 2.) Our Blessed Lord tells us to be watchful, for when least we" expect it, He will come to judge us. (St. Luke xii. 40.) St. Gregory observes, that God, for our good, keeps the hour of bur death hidden from us, so that we may ever be found prepared for death. Since, therefore, at any time, and in any place, death may deprive us of life, St. Bernard remarks, that at every time, and in every place, we must stand awaiting it, if we would die a happy death and be saved.

Every one knows that he or she must die, but the mistake that so many make, is to imagine that death is so far off, that they, as it were, lose sight of it. Even old men, who are most infirm, and people who are very sickly, flatter themselves that they have at least three or four years more to live. But, on the contrary, I say, how many have we not known during our lifetime, who have died suddenly; some sitting, some walking, and some lying upon their beds? And certainly none of those who have died thus suddenly, ever thought to die in that way, or upon that day upon which they died. And, moreover, I say how many who have this year passed on to another life, and who have died from some slight illness, never for once imagined that then: days were this year to come to an end. Few indeed are the deaths which do not happen unexpectedly. Therefore, dear Christian brother, when the devil tempts you to sin, saying, that to-morrow, after the sin has been committed, you will go to confession; answer him in this manner, "And how do I not know that to-day may not be the last of my days upon earth?" If that hour or that moment in which I sinned against God were to be the last for me, so that there would be no time to implore forgiveness for it, what would become of me in eternity? To how many poor sinners has it not happened, that in the same moment in which they have been yielding to some wicked passion, death has overtaken them suddenly, and they have been cast into hell? "As the fishes that are taken in an evil net, so are the sons of men snared in an evil time." (Eccles. ix. 12.) The "evil time" is precisely that, in which the sinner actually offends God. The devil tells you that it will not happen in this way with you; but you ought to say, if it should happen, thus what will become of me for all eternity?

Affections and Prayers

Dear Lord, the place where I ought now to be, is not here where I now am but in hell, where I have deserved to be so many times, because of my many transgressions. "Hell is my house." But St. Peter tells us, that "the

Lord. . . is longsuffering to us-ward, hot willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." (i St. Pet. iii. 9.) Therefore it is, that Thou hast had so much patience with me, and hast waited so long for.me, because Thou didst not wish me to be lost, but Thou didst wish me to come to repentance. Yes, my God, I come to Thee, I cast myself at Thy feet, I crave for mercy. "Have mercy upon me, O God, after Thy great goodness." O Lord, great and extraordinary mercy is needed for me, because I have offended Thee, although Thou hast blessed me with Thy light. Many are the sinners who have offended Thee but they have not had the light which Thou hast graciously given to me. And yet for all that, still Thou dost command me to repent of my sins, and I hope for pardon from Thee. Yes, my dear Redeemer, I repent with all my heart for having offended Thee, and I look for pardon through the merits of Thy Passion. Thou, my Jesus, being innocent, was willing to die like a guilty one upon the cross, and to shed all Thy Blood to wash away my sins. "O Blood of the Innocent, wash away the sins of the penitent." O Eternal Father, pardon me, for the love of Jesus Christ, listen to the prayers that He makes for me, now that He is interceding for me, and making Himself my Advocate. But it is not sufficient for me to be pardoned. O God, Thou who art worthy of infinite love, I want the grace to love Thee. I do love Thee, O my Sovereign Good, and I offer Thee from henceforth my soul, my body, my will, and my liberty. From this time I will avoid, not only grave offences, but also slight ones. I will fly from all dangerous occasions. "Lead us not into temptation." Deliver me, for the love of Jesus Christ, from these occasions in which I might chance to offend Thee. "But deliver us from evil." Deliver me from sin, and then punish me as Thou wilt. I accept all the infirmities, griefs, and losses which it may please Thee to send me, there is nothing that I mind, if I do not lose Thy grace, and Thy love. Thou dost promise to give me whatsoever I ask, "Ask and it shall be given you." I ask Thee for these two graces, holy perseverance, and the grace to love Thee.

SECOND POINT

The Lord does not wish us to be lost, therefore He never ceases to warn us to change our habit of life, by threatening to punish us. "If a man will not turn, He will whet His sword," (Ps. vii. 13.) "Behold," He says in another place, "how many, because they would not leave off sinning when they were least expecting it, and were living in peace, thinking to live for many long years, have been surprised by death, which has suddenly come upon them." "For when they shall say peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them." (i Thess. v. 3.) Likewise He says: "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." (St. Luke xiii. 3.)

Why, therefore, does He give us so many warnings before He sends the punishment if He does not wish that we should amend our lives, and so avoid dying an unhappy death. St. Augustine well observes that he who says to thee "Take care," wishes thee no ill.

It is therefore necessary to prepare our account before the day of reckoning may arrive. My Christian brother, if before this night arrives you should die, and your eternal welfare should be decided, what do you think? Would your reckoning be right; or would you not indeed be rather willing to give anything to obtain from God one year, one month, or at least one day more? And wherefore, now that God does give you this time, do you not seek to make your conscience free from everything? Is it because you cannot think this day can be the last for you? "Delay not to be converted to the Lord, and defer it not from day to day. For His wrath shall come on a sudden, and in the time of vengeance He will destroy thee." (Ecclus. v. 8, 9.) If you wish to be saved, my brother, sin must be left; therefore, as a day will come when you must leave it, why do you not leave it now? inquires St. Augustine. Perhaps you are expecting death; but for those who are obstinate, death is not the time for pardon, but for vengeance. "In the time of vengeance He will destroy thee." (Ecclus. v. 9.)

When some one owes you a large sum of money, you immediately take the precaution to provide yourself with a written security, saying to yourself, "Who knows what may happen?" And why do you not use the same precaution concerning your immortal soul, which is of much more importance than the large sum of money? Why do you not say of your soul, "Who knows what may happen?" If you were to lose that money, you would not lose everything; and even if in losing it you should lose all your patrimony, still you would have the hope of regaining it. But if in death you should lose your soul, then indeed would you lose all, and there would be no hope of ever again rescuing it. You are so diligent in keeping an account of your money, lest by chance any should be lost if a sudden death were to befall you; and if death should come upon you unawares, while you are at enmity with God, what would become of your soul for all eternity?

Affections and Prayers

All, my Redeemer, Thou hast shed all Thy Blood. Thou hast given Thy life to save my soul, and I have so often lost it, hoping in Thy mercy; and in this way have I so often made use of Thy great goodness, for what? to offend Thee more. For this, I did deserve that Thou shouldst suddenly

deprive me of life, and then send me to everlasting punishment. I have as it were been striving with Thee; but Thou hast striven, by showing mercy towards me, and I by offending Thee; Thou by seeking me, and I by flying from Thee; Thou by giving me time to implore pardon for all the offences committed against Thee, and I by using that time to add offence to offence. Gracious Lord, make me feel the great wrong I have done against Thee, and make me feel that it is my greatest duty to love Thee. Ah, my Jesus, how couldst Thou love me so much, Thou who didst seek me so many times when I strove to drive Thee from me? How couldst Thou show so many favours to one who has so often given Thee offence? From all this I feel how desirous Thou art for me not to be lost. I repent with all my heart for having offended Thee, O God of infinite goodness. Ah, receive this ungrateful sheep who returns repentant to Thy feet; receive it, and bind it to Thy shoulders, so that it may never more stray from Thee. No, I will never more fly from Thee. I would love Thee, I would be Thine, and if only I am Thine I am content with every pain, for what greater pain can I feel, than to live without Thy grace, separated from Thee,Who art my God, Who hast created me, and my God Who has died for me? Ah, hateful sins, what have you done ? You have made me displease my dear Saviour, Who hast loved me so much. Ah, my Jesus, as Thou hast died for me, even so ought I to die for Thee. Thou didst die for love of me, and I ought to die of grief for having so much displeased Thee.

I accept death when and in what manner it may please Thee to send it to me but until now I have not loved Thee, or I have not loved Thee enough; it is not thus that I would die. Oh grant me a little more time, so that I may indeed love Thee before I die. Therefore, change my heart, wound it, inflame it with Thy holy love. Grant this, through that exceeding love which made Thee die for me. I love Thee with all my soul, and I am indeed desirous to love Thee. Never let me lose Thee more. Give me holy perseverance, and give me Thy most holy love.

THIRD POINT

"Be ye ready." The Lord does not say that we must prepare ourselves when death comes upon us, but that death, when it comes, must find us prepared. When death comes, as it will do, in as it were a great tempest and confusion, it will be almost impossible to give ease to a troubled conscience. Even thus does reason argue. But God warns us by saying that He will not then come to give pardon, but to avenge the scorn which the wicked have shown concerning His favours. "Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." (Rom. xii. 19.)

St. Augustine observes that this will be a just punishment for that one who, when able, has not wished to be saved, and who, when willing to be saved, will not be able. But some will say, "Perhaps even then it will be possible for me to be converted and live." But would you throw yourself into a well, saying, Perhaps even though I throw myself in, I may live and not die? O God! what a thing is this, that sin should so darken the mind as to make it lose even reason. When men speak of the body, they speak like wise men; but when they speak of the soul, they speak like fools.

My brother, perhaps this point that you are now reading may be the last warning that God may send you. Let us hasten to prepare for death, so that it may not overtake us being unprepared. St. Augustine says that God keeps the last day of our lives secret from us, so that at any, and every day, we may be prepared to die. St. Paul teaches us that it is not only necessary to work out our salvation with fear, but even with trembling. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." (Phil. ii. 12.) St. Antoninus tells us of a certain king of Sicily who, in order to make one of his subjects understand the fear in which he occupied the throne, made him sit at table with a sword suspended by a slender thread over his head, so that being thus situated, he could hardly eat any food. We are all standing in the same danger, for at any moment the sword of death may fall upon us, upon which our eternal salvation depends.

It is indeed a question of eternity. "If the tree fall toward the south or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth there it shall be." (Eccles. xi. 3.) If when death comes, it should find us in the grace of God, Oh, what joy will it be for the soul then to exclaim, "I have secured all things, never again can I lose God; I shall be happy for ever." But, on the contrary, if when death comes it should find the soul in a state of sin, with what despair will it then cry out, "Thus have I sinned, and my sin can never be reclaimed for all eternity." Oh, wherefore did I err? and my sin will never be pardoned throughout all eternity! This fear made the venerable Father Avila, when the announcement was brought to him that he was dying, cry out and say, "Oh that I had a little more time to prepare myself for death!" This fear also made the Abbot Agathe exclaim, although he died after many years of repentance, "What will become of me; for who can understand the judgments of God?" St. Arsenius also trembled when the hour of death arrived, and being asked why he was in such fear, answered, "This fear is not new to me, I have felt it all my life." Especially did holy Job tremble, saying, "What then shall I do when God riseth up? and when He visiteth, what shall I answer Him?" (Job xxxi. 14.)

Affections and Prayers

Ah, my God, there is no one who has ever loved me as Thou hast loved me? and yet there is no one whom I have ever displeased more than I have displeased Thee. My only hope is in Thy Blood, O my Jesus. Eternal Father, look not upon my sins, but look upon the blessed wounds of Jesus Christ; look upon thy well-beloved Son, Who is grieving for me, and beseeching Thee to pardon me. I am very sorry, O my Creator, for having displeased Thee; it grieves me more than any other evil that I have done. Thou didst create me to love Thee, and I have been living as if Thou hadst created me to offend Thee. For the love of Jesus Christ pardon me, and give me grace to love Thee. At one time I resisted Thy will; now I will no longer resist it; I will do all that Thou dost command me. Thou dost wish me to detest all the offences which I have committed against Thee. I do indeed detest them with all my heart. Thou dost command me to resolve never more to offend Thee; then I do indeed resolve to lose my life rather than to lose Thy grace. Thou dost wish me to love Thee with my whole heart, then indeed I will love Thee with all my heart, and will love none other than Thee; and Thou shalt be, from this day forth, my only loved one, my only love. Thou dost command me to have holy perseverance, but it is from Thee alone that I can hope to obtain it. For the love of Jesus Christ, let me ever be faithful to Thee; and that I may always say to Thee with St. Bonaventure, "My beloved is one, my love is one." No, I do not want my life to be spent any longer in giving Thee even the slightest offence. I would spend it only in weeping over the displeasure I have given Thee, and in loving Thee.

Return to the Fourth Meditation . . . *Proceed to the Sixth Meditation*

Saints' Prayers

selected from the annals of history unto our current day

Meditations

Considerations by St. Alphonsus Maria de Liguori

from the book, 'Preparation for Death'

CONSIDERATION VI

The Death of the Sinner

"Destruction cometh; and they shall seek peace, and there shall be none. Mischief shall come upon mischief." Ezek. vii. 25, 26.

FIRST POINT

It is now that sinners try, as far as they can, to drive away the memory and the thought of death, and thus to find peace, although they never will do so, by leading a life of sin; but when in the agonies of death, they must enter into eternity when "destruction cometh and they shall seek peace, and there shall be none;" then they will try to fly from the stings of their troubled consciences; they will seek peace, but what peace can a soul find which is laden with sin, which bites it like so many vipers? What peace, knowing that in so short a time it will have to appear before Jesus Christ the Judge, whose law and friendship, until that moment, it has esteemed of so little worth? "Mischief shall come upon mischief." The intelligence that the sinner has just received, that he is dying, the thought that he must bid farewell to everything in this world, the stings of a troubled conscience, the time that is for ever lost, the time that he is now in want of, the severity of the Divine Judge, the miserable eternity which awaits all sinners the thought of all these things will come upon him in terrible confusion, which will greatly trouble his mind and increase his apprehensions, and thus confused, and being filled with fear, the soul of the dying man will pass into the other life. Abraham, to whom great praise is due, hoped in God against all human hope, believing in the Divine promise, "who against hope believed in hope." But sinners, with great demerit, and who are the cause of their own ruin, falsely hope, not only against hope, but even against faith, whilst they pay no attention whatever to the warning which God gives to those who are obstinate. They dread an unhappy death, but they have no fear in leading a wicked life. But who is able to assure them, that their death will not suddenly be caused by a thunderbolt, by an apoplectic fit, or by the bursting of a blood vessel? And even should they have time, when they are dying, to be converted, who can assure them, that their conversion will then be a true one? St. Augustine had to strive against his evil habits for twelve years, in order to overcome them. How then will one, who is dying, who has

ever had a conscience stained with sin, who will be tormented with pain, with dreadful feelings in the head, and who will be in the confusion of death, how will he, then, I repeat, be possibly able to be truly converted? I say truly, because at that time the saying and promising will be of no use, it will be necessary to say and to promise from the depth of the heart. O God, into what terror will not the miserable sufferer be thrown, whose conscience, when remorseful, has been blighted, when he finds himself oppressed by his sins, and by the fears of the coming judgment, by the thought of hell and of eternity? Into what dreadful confusion will not these thoughts throw him, when he finds that his memory is failing him, his mind becoming darkened, and his body overcome with the pains of death which is already fast approaching ? He will confess, he will promise, he will weep, he will cry to God for mercy, but without knowing what he is doing; and in that tempest of agitation, of remorse, of anguish, and of fear, his soul will pass into the other world." The people shall be troubled at midnight and pass away." (Job xxxiv. 20.) It is well said by an author, that the prayers, the tears, and the promises of a dying sinner, are like the tears and promises of a man who finds himself assailed by his enemy, who puts a dagger to his throat to take away his life. He who lies down on his bed, and whose soul passes from it to eternity, is indeed a wretched man, if he lies down in the great displeasure of Almighty God.

Affections and Prayers

The wounds of Jesus are my only hope. I should despair of pardon for my sins, did I not look upon you, ye fountains of pity and of mercy, through which my God has shed all His Blood to wash my soul from the many sins which it has committed. I adore you, O ye holy wounds, and in you confide. I detest and abhor those unworthy pleasures through which I have displeased my dear Redeemer, and through which I have lost His holy friendship. Looking then upon you, my hopes are raised, and therefore I turn my affections towards you. My beloved Jesus, it is only right that all men should love Thee, and that they should love Thee with their whole heart. But I have so often offended Thee, and counted Thy holy love of no moment; and yet. notwithstanding all my shortcomings, Thou hast borne with me so long, and hast so often offered me pardon. Ah, my Saviour, never more let me offend Thee, and by so doing lose my soul for ever. O God! what dreadful pain it would give me to see Thy dear Blood, and to remember Thy many mercies which Thou hast shown to me, if I should ever be cast into everlasting punishment. I love Thee now, and I would love Thee for ever. Give me holy perseverance. Take away from my heart every love that is not Thine, and establish in me a real

desire and resolution to love Thee alone. Thou Who art my Sovereign Good, may I do this from henceforth and for ever.

SECOND POINT

The agonies of the dying sinner will not be one agony only, but they will be many. It will be one agony to be tormented by the devil. When the hour of death comes, that dreadful enemy uses all his strength to ruin that soul which is on the point of launching into eternity. The devil knows that at that hour, there is but little time to gain that soul, and that if it is lost to him then, it will be lost for ever. "The devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time." (Rev. xii. 12.) There will not only be one devil, but many devils, who will surround the dying man, who will do all that lies in their power to gain his soul. "Their houses shall be full of doleful creatures." (Isa. xiii. 21.) One will say, "Fear not, thou wilt soon be well." Another will say, "How is it that thou, who for so many years hast been deaf to the voice of God, canst expect Him now to show thee mercy?" And another, "How canst thou now remedy those evils that are done, and the reputations thou hast ruined?" And another, "Dost thou not see that thy confessions have been of no avail, without true grief; without any intention to do better for the future? How then canst thou now repair the evil which is done?" Besides all this, the dying man will behold himself surrounded by his sins: "Evil shall hunt the wicked person to overthrow him." (Ps. cxl. ii.) St. Bernard observes that these sins, like so many watchful guards, shall hold him in their grasp, and shall say to him, "We are thy works; we will not leave thee; we will go with thy soul to the other world, and with it present ourselves to the Eternal Judge." Then the dying man will want to rid himself of these enemies; but to get rid of them it would be necessary to hate them; it would be necessary for his heart to become converted to God. Whereas his mind is darkened, and his heart is hardened. "hard heart shall fear evil at the last; and he that loveth danger shall perish in it." (Ecclus. iii. 27.) St. Bernard says, that heart which has been so obstinate in sin during life, will use every means to free itself when dying from this state of condemnation, but will be unable to do so; and being oppressed with its own wickedness, will pass from life in this state. Until the hour of death arrived, the sinner always loved sin; he has also loved the danger of his own damnation; very justly therefore will the Lord allow him to perish in that peril in which he has loved to live until the time of his death. St. Augustine believes, that "he who is left by sin before he himself leaves it, at the hour of death will hardly dislike it as much as he ought, because whatever he does at that time will be done through necessity."

Miserable indeed is that sinner who is so hardened that he resists the voice of God when He calls him! "His heart is as firm as a stone; yea, as hard as a piece of the nether millstone." (Job xli. 24.) Instead of yielding and being softened by the voice of God, he becomes more hardened; even as the anvil is hardened by the strokes of the hammer. As a punishment for all this, he will find himself in the same obstinate frame of mind at the hour of death, although he may be on the point of passing into eternity. "A hard heart shall fear evil at the last." Sinners, saith the Lord, "have turned their back unto me, and not their face: but in the time of their trouble they will say, Arise, and save us. But where are thy gods that thou hast made thee? let them arise, if they can save thee." (Jer. ii. 27, 28.) The miserable sinners when dying will fly unto God, and God will say to them, "Now you can come to me. Call upon creatures to help you, for they have been your gods." Even thus will the Lord answer those who at that time seek Him, because they will not seek Him with any sincere wish to become converted. St. Jerome has said, that he fully believes, and has learnt from experience, that he who has led a wicked life until the hour of death, will never be happy when the hour of death arrives.

Affections and Prayers

My dear Saviour, help me, and do not abandon me, for I see my soul all wounded with my sins; my passions do violence to me, and my evil habits oppress me. I throw myself at Thy feet; have mercy upon me, and deliver me from all my evil passions. "In Thee, O Lord, have I put my trust : let me never be put to confusion." (Ps. lxxi. i.) Do not permit a soul that trusts in Thee to be lost. I repent of having offended Thee, O God of Infinite Goodness; I have done evil, and I confess it. I wish to amend, at any price. But unless Thou dost assist me with Thy grace, I am lost. Receive, O my Jesus, this rebellious one, who has displeased Thee so much. Remember that Thou didst spend Thy Blood and Thy Life for me. Through the merits, therefore, of Thy Passion and of Thy Death, receive me into Thy arms, and give me holy perseverance. I was almost lost, but Thou didst call me; behold, I will no longer resist; I consecrate myself to Thee; bind me to Thy love, and never more allow me to lose myself by again losing Thy grace. Do not, my Jesus, allow it.

THIRD POINT

It is a marvellous thing that God does nothing but threaten sinners with an unhappy death: "Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer." (Prov. i. 28.) "Will God hear his cry when trouble cometh upon him?" (Job

xxvii. 9.) "I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock." (Prov. i. 26.) God laughs when He will not show mercy. "To Me belongeth vengeance and recompense; their foot shall slide in due time." (Deut. xxxii. 35.) In many other places God threatens the same, and yet sinners live in peace, and are as secure, as if God had certainly promised to give them pardon when dying, and after death, to give them Paradise. It is quite true that, in whatever hour the sinner is converted, God has promised to pardon him; but He has not said that the sinner shall be converted in death. On the contrary, He has often declared that he who lives in sin shall die in sin: "Ye. . . shall die in your sins." (St. John viii. 21.) He has said in another place that he who seeks Him in death shall not find Him. "Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me." (St. John vii. 34.) Therefore, it is indeed necessary to seek God when He can be found. " Seek ye the Lord while He may be found." (Isa. Iv. 6.) Yes, because there will be a time when He will no longer be found. Poor sinners poor blind ones who put off their conversion until the hour of their death, when there will be no more time to be converted! Oleaster well says, that "the wicked will never have learned to do well save when there is no time in which to do it." God wishes all men to be saved; but He will punish those who are obstinate in their sins.

If some miserable sinner living in sin should be seized with an apoplectic fit, and thus be deprived of his senses, what pity all those would feel who would see him die thus, without the Sacraments, and without any sign of repentance! and, on the contrary, what great joy would not every one experience, if this poor sinner should recover from his fit, seek for absolution, and become repentant? But is not he indeed mad who, having time to repent, continues in a state of sin, or else returns to sin, and so places himself in danger of being surprised by death, at the same time that he is perhaps committing sin? It is very fearful to see any one die suddenly, and yet so many put themselves in danger of dying thus, and in danger of dying in sin. "A just weight and balance are the Lord's." (Prov. xvi. II.) We do not take any account of the favours which the Lord bestows upon us; but the Lord takes the account and measures them; and when He sees them despised up to a certain point, lie allows the sinner to remain in his sin, and in this state to die. Miserable indeed is that one who defers his repentance until the day of his death. St. Augustine remarks that "the repentance which is demanded of the infirm is infirm." St. Jerome says, that amongst a hundred thousand sinners who remain in a state of sin until the day of their death, hardly one will be saved. St. Vincent Ferrer declares that it would be a greater miracle for one who has lived in habitual sin all his life to be saved, than it would be to raise one who is dead, to life. What sorrow or what repentance could be felt at

the hour of death by him who until that time, has loved sin? Bellarmine tells us that, having gone to assist a dying person, and having exhorted him to make one act of contrition, the dying one answered that he did not understand what contrition meant. Bellarmine tried to explain to him, but the sick one said, "I do not understand you, father; I am not capable of these things." And thus he died, "leaving clear signs of his condemnation." St. Augustine observes that it will be a just punishment to that sinner who has been unmindful of God during his life, to be unmindful of himself in death. The apostle warns us, saying, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap: for he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption." (Gal. vi. 7, 8.) It would indeed be mocking God for any one to live, despising his love, and then to reap a reward and everlasting glory; but "God is not mocked." That which is sown in this life, shall be reaped in the next. He who loves the forbidden pleasures of this life, shall reap corruption, misery, and eternal death in the life to come. Christian brother, what is said for others is also said for you. Tell me, if you were now at the point of death, despaired of by the doctors, and already in great pain, would you not pray to God to grant you one more month, one more week, in order to make your conscience clear in His sight? But God does give you that time now. Return thanks to Him, and quickly try to atone for the evil you have done, and use every means to be found in a state of grace whenever death shall come, because then there will be no time to atone for past evils.

Affections and Prayers

Ah, my God, and who is there who would have had so much patience with me as Thou hast! If Thy goodness were not infinite, I should cease to hope for pardon. But I have to do with a God who died to pardon and to save me. Thou dost command me to hope, and I will hope. If my sins affright and condemn me, Thy merits and Thy promises give me courage. Thou hast promised the life of Thy grace to him who returns to Thee, "Turn yourselves and live ye." (Ezek. xviii. 32.) Thou hast promised to embrace him who turns to Thee. "Turn ye unto Me, . . . and I will turn unto you." (Zee. i. 3.) Thou hast said that Thou wilt not despise him who humbles himself and repents. "A broken and contrite heart, O God, shalt Thou not despise." (Ps. ci. 17.) Behold, O Lord, I return and come to Thee; I confess myself worthy of condemnation, and I repent of having offended Thee. I sincerely promise never more to offend Thee willingly, and I would wish to love Thee for evermore. Ah, do not allow me to be any more ungrateful towards such goodness. Eternal Father, through the merits of the obedience of Thy Son Jesus Christ, Who died in obedience

to Thy will, let me obey Thee in all things until death. I love Thee, O Thou Highest Good, and because of the love I bear for Thee, I would obey Thee in all things. Give me holy perseverance, Thy holy love, and I ask for nothing more.

Return to the Fifth Meditation . . . *Proceed to the Seventh Meditation*

Saints' Prayers

selected from the annals of history unto our current day

Meditations

Considerations by St. Alphonsus Maria de Liguori

from the book, 'Preparation for Death'

CONSIDERATION VII

Sentiments of One who has Reflected little upon Death

"Set thine house in order: for thou shall die and not live." Isa. xxxviii. i.

FIRST POINT

IMAGINE yourself at the bed-side of some sick person, to whom a few hours of life alone remain. Poor creature, see how much he is overcome with pain, with fainting fits, with suffocation, with want of breath, with cold perspirations, with a weakness of the brain, that he can scarcely hear, understand, or speak. But the greatest misery he endures is, that he feels death is approaching, and instead of thinking about his soul, and of making his reckoning sure, he thinks alone about his physicians, and the remedies which can be applied to free him from the disease, and from the pains which are killing him. St. Laurence Justinian, speaking of people who are thus dying, observes that "Nothing, save themselves,

suffices to occupy their thoughts." His relations and friends should, at least, warn him of the dangerous state in which he is; but no, there is not one amongst them who has the courage to tell him that he is dying, and instead of advising him to take the Holy Sacrament, all refuse to tell him, lest they should give him offence by so doing. O my God from this moment, I indeed thank Thee that when I am dying Thou wilt allow me to be assisted by the dear brothers of my congregation, whose only interest will then be my eternal salvation, and who will all endeavour, as far as they can, to make my death a glorious one But although they do not warn him that death is approaching, nevertheless, the sick man, seeing the family in such confusion, the number of doctors who are so busily talking, the many and numberless remedies that are tried, is filled with terror and confusion, and amidst the continued attacks of fear, remorse, and distrust, says within himself, "Alas! perhaps the end of my days is already come." What then will be the feelings of the dying man when he is told that he is dying? "Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die and not live." With what fear, will he not be told that his illness is mortal, that he must make his peace with God, and receive the Blessed Sacrament, and bid farewell to the world? What! he exclaims, must I leave the world, and all I possess, that house, that villa, those relations, friends, conversations, games, and amusements? He is told that he must, for already is the lawyer come, and then he has to sign this document, "I bequeath, I bequeath." And what does he take away with him? Nothing, except what he is covered with, which, within a very short time will decay with him in the grave.

Oh what grief and sadness will the dying man feel, when he sees the tears of his household, and the silence of his friends who keep silence, not having the heart to speak in his presence! But the greatest punishment that he will have to bear, will be the dreadful stings of conscience which in that tempest, as it were, will be felt so much more, because of the corrupt life which he has led, up to the hour of his death notwithstanding the seasonable advice of his spiritual fathers, and the many resolutions made, which have been either never performed or else entirely neglected. He will then exclaim, "O wretched one that I am, God has granted me so many lights, I have had so much time to make my conscience clear in his sight, and yet I have not done it; and at length death has overtaken me! What would it have cost me to fly from that occasion to sin, to keep myself from that friendship, and to avail myself of confession? And even though it should have cost me much, nevertheless I ought to have done everything I could, to save my immortal soul which was all-important. Oh, that I had carried that good resolution into practice. Oh, that I had continued as I began. Then indeed should I be

happy now! But I did not do it, and now there is no time. The feelings of dying men, such as I have described, who have been during life so forgetful of their conscience, resemble the feelings of those who are for ever lost, who, when in hell, lament over their sins as being the cause of their punishment, but they lament without finding any relief or remedy.

Affections and Prayers

O Lord, if at this moment the news of my approaching death were to be brought to me, such would be my sentiments of grief. But I thank Thee for giving me this light and this time to amend. No, my God, I do not wish to fly again from Thee; it is so many times that Thou hast sought me. Justly indeed ought I now to fear, lest, if I do not return to Thee again and come to Thee, Thou wilt altogether abandon me. Thou didst give me a heart to love Thee, but I have put it to so bad a use; I have loved the creature, but I have not loved Thee, Who art my Creator and my Redeemer, and Who didst give Thy life for me! Instead of loving Thee, Oh, how many times have I not displeased Thee, and turned away from following Thee! I was fully aware that in committing that sin, I should displease Thee, and yet I did commit it. My Jesus, I am truly sorry for it; I mourn over it with all my heart: I would indeed become changed. I renounce all the pleasures of the world, so that I may love, and please Thee, O God of my soul. Thou hast given me so many proofs of Thy love, that I should wish to give Thee some proofs of my love before I die. From this time I will accept every infirmity, and every cross, every scorn, and every vexation, that I must receive from men only give me strength to endure the same in peace, for I wish to endure them all to gain Thy love. I love Thee, O Infinite Goodness, more than anything, only give me more love, and holy perseverance.

SECOND POINT

Oh, how clearly, when the hour of death arrives, do the truths of faith make themselves felt only to add greater torment to that dying man who has lived a wicked life, and particularly if he is one who has been consecrated to God, and so has had much opportunity of serving Him, much time, many good examples, and much inspiration. O God, with what grief will he then reflect and say, "I once admonished others, and afterwards have committed more grievous sin than they. I once left the world, and afterwards have become more attached to its pleasures, vanities, and love." With what remorse will he then reflect upon the light which he has received from God, such as would have changed a heathen into a saint! With what remorse will he then recall to mind that he had

despised the practices of piety in others as weakness of mind, and had praised certain worldly maxims of self-esteem and self-love; such as not liking other people to take precedence of us, to avoid suffering, and to enjoy every pleasure which may present itself.

"The desire of the ungodly shall perish." (Ps. cxii. 10.) When the hour of death arrives, how much will the time which we waste now be coveted? St. Gregory tells us in his Dialogues, of a certain rich man, named Chrysantius, - who had led a very wicked life, and who, when the hour of death came, cried out against the devils who visibly appeared to him to seize him, "Give me time, give me until "to-morrow." And these answered him, saying, "O fool, dost thou now seek time? Thou hast had so much and wasted it, and spent it in sin; and now dost thou ask for it? Now there is no more time for thee." The wretched man continued to cry and to implore help. A son of his, whose name was Massimo, and who was a monk, was with him, to whom the dying man said, "My son, help me; Massimo, my son, help me." And in the meantime, throwing himself from one side of the bed to the other, and thus agitated, and with cries of despair, he breathed forth his wretched soul. Alas, that these foolish ones should so love their folly in life, but should put off until the hour of death to open their eyes to their folly, and then confess that they have been so unwise! For at that time it only serves to increase the difficulties which they feel in trying to atone for the sins which they have committed; and dying in this frame of mind, the salvation of these souls is very doubtful. My brother, perhaps whilst reading this you are saying to yourself, "Yes, it is very doubtful." But if it is so doubtful, your folly and your misfortune is much greater still if, as you know and understand these truths in life, you do not try during life to make amends for past sins. These words, even, which you have just read, would be a sword of sorrow for you in death.

Arise, therefore, for as there is time to avoid a death so frightful, hasten to make amends for the past, and wait not until there will be no fit time for reparation. Wait not for another month, another week. It may be that this light which God now grants to you in mercy, may be the last light and the last call for you. It is foolish, indeed, not to wish to think upon death, which is absolutely certain, and on which eternity depends; but it is greater folly to think upon it, and not to prepare for it. Make those reflections and resolutions now, which you would make if you were dying now with profit, but at that time very uselessly; now in the hope of being saved, but at that time in great fear, lest you should not be saved. A gentleman of the court of Charles XI., when leaving court, being asked by the emperor for what reason he was leaving, answered, that in order to

be saved it is necessary that some interval should elapse between the time of repentance from a sinful life and the hour of death, so that a period of repentance may be passed through.

Affections and Prayers

No, my God, I will no longer abuse Thy mercy. I thank Thee for the light which Thou art now giving me, and I promise Thee to change my life, to amend my life. I can see plainly that Thou wilt not bear with me much longer. And shall I wait until Thou wilt be constrained to condemn me to everlasting death? or until Thou wilt give me up to a life utterly lost, which would be a greater punishment to me than death itself? Look upon me at Thy feet; receive me into Thy favour. I know I do not deserve it; but Thou hast said that "the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall thereby in the day that he turneth from his wickedness." (Ezek. xxxiii. 12.) If, therefore, my Jesus, in the time that is past, I have offended Thy infinite Goodness, now I repent with all my heart, and I hope for pardon from Thee. With St. Anselm, I will say to Thee, "Suffer not my soul to be lost through its sins, for Thou hast redeemed it with Thy Blood." Look not upon my ingratitude, look only upon that love which caused Thee to die for me. If I have lost Thy grace, Thou hast not lost the power to give it back to me. Have pity therefore upon me, my dear Redeemer. Pardon me, and give me the grace to love Thee; whilst I, from this day forward, promise to love none other than Thee. Thou hast chosen me from amongst so many of Thy creatures to love Thee; therefore I choose Thee, O my Sovereign Good, to love Thee above every other thing. Thou dost go before me with Thy Cross I will not cease to follow Thee with that cross which Thou dost give me to carry. I embrace every mortification and every trouble which may come to me from Thee. It is enough that I am not deprived of Thy grace, for with that I am indeed content.

THIRD POINT

To the dying man, who during life has been forgetful concerning his soul's good, there will be thorns in everything that presents itself to him. There will be a thorn in the memory of pleasures that are past a thorn in the remembrance of rivalries overcome, and of pomps displayed a thorn in the friends who will come to see him, with everything that they bring back to his memory a thorn in the spiritual fathers, who by turns will assist him a thorn in the last Sacraments which he will receive.

The poor sufferer will then exclaim, "O fool that I have been! I ought to have become a saint, with all the lights, and opportunities, which God

granted to me; I ought to have led a life of happiness, in the favour of God; and now, what is remaining to me of the many years that are past, except torments, distrust, fears, stings of conscience, and an account which I shall have to render up to God? And it is indeed doubtful whether my soul will be saved." And when will he say all this? Not until the oil in his lamp is nearly consumed, and the scene of this world is about to close upon him for ever not until he has both eternities in view: the one an eternity of everlasting joy; the other an eternity of everlasting woe not until the tune is approaching for that last gasp, upon which depends his everlasting blessedness, or his everlasting despair even as long as God is God. What would he not then give, to have one more year, one more month, or at least one more week, with a clear head? For suffering then, as he will do, with distraction of the head, oppression at the chest, and failing breath, he will be able to do nothing; he will not be able to reflect, nor to employ his mind in doing one good action; he finds himself shut up as it were in a dark pit of confusion, where he can imagine nothing else but that there is a great ruin hanging over him from which he feels himself unable to flee away. Therefore he will long for time; but it will be said to him, *"Proficiscere,"* depart, make haste, put your accounts in order as best you can, during the short time which remains to you, and depart; for dost thou not know that death neither waits for, nor respects any one? Oh what terror will it then be for him to think and to say, "I am alive this morning; very likely this evening I shall be dead! To-day I am lying in this room; perhaps to-morrow I may be in my grave! And where will my soul be?" When he feels the cold sweat of death coming upon him when he hears his relations go from the room, never more to return during his life when his sight begins to grow dim and his eyes become darkened but what will be the use of understanding these truths then, when the tune for profiting by the understanding, is past?

Affections and Prayers

Ah, my God, Thou dost not wish me to die; but Thou desirest that I should be converted and live. I thank Thee for having waited for me until now, and I thank Thee for the light which Thou art now giving me. I know the error I have committed in neglecting Thy friendship, the vile and miserable pleasures through which I have accounted Thee of so little value. I repent and I grieve with all my heart, for having done Thee so grievous a wrong. Ah, do not cease, in the life which may remain to me, to assist me with Thy light and Thy grace, so that I may know how to do that which I must do, in order to amend my life. Of what use will it be for me to understand this truth, when the time for reparation will be taken from me? "Deliver not up to beasts the souls that trust in Thee." When

the devil shall tempt me again to offend Thee, I beseech Thee, my Jesus, through the merits of Thy Passion, to stretch forth Thy hand and to deliver me from falling into sin, and from again remaining a slave of the enemy. Grant, that then I may ever flee unto Thee, and that I may never cease to entreat Thy protection as long as the temptation may last. Thy Blood is my hope, and Thy Goodness is my love. I love Thee, my God. Thou Who art worthy of infinite love, grant that I may ever love Thee. Let me know from what things I must separate myself so that I may be Thine alone, for I would be Thine alone; but do Thou give me the strength to fulfil the same.

Return to the Sixth Meditation . . . *Proceed to the Eighth Meditation*

Saints' Prayers

selected from the annals of history unto our current day

Meditations

Considerations by St. Alphonsus Maria de Liguori

from the book, 'Preparation for Death'

CONSIDERATION VIII

The Death of the Just

"Right dear in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." Ps. cxvi. 13.

FIRST POINT

WHEN we view death according to the senses, it terrifies and affrights us, but when we view it with the eye of faith, it consoles us and makes us desire it. It appears terrible to sinners, but lovely and very precious to

saints. St. Bernard tells us, that "death is precious as the end of labours, the consummation of victory, the gate of life." "The end of labour," yes, truly, does death put an end to our labours and toil. "Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble." (Job xiv. i.)

Behold what our life is; it is short, it is full of misery, infirmities, fears, and passions. The worldly, who desire a long life, what do they seek, observes Seneca, but a longer time of suffering? If we continue to live, do we not continue to suffer? as St. Augustine himself remarks. Yes, indeed, because, according to St. Ambrose, our present life was not given to us for repose, but for work, and by that work to make ourselves worthy of eternal life. When God, as Tertullian justly observes, shortens the life of any one, He shortens his suffering. Hence it is, that although death was given to man as a punishment for sin, yet, notwithstanding this, the miseries of this life are such, as St. Ambrose remarks, that death would appear to be given to us rather as a relief than a punishment. God calls those who die in His grace blessed, because their labours are finished, and they go to their rest. "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours." (Rev. xiv. 13.)

The torments which afflict the sinners, when dying, do not trouble the saints. "The souls of the just are in the hand of God, and the torment of death shall not touch them." (Wisd. iii. I.) The saints do not grieve when they hear that which terrifies the worldly so much. The saints are not troubled when they have to leave their worldly goods, for they have kept their hearts severed from them. They go about ever repeating to themselves, "God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever." (Ps. Ixxiii. 25.)

Blessed are you, writes the Apostle to his disciples, who have been stripped of all your earthly possessions, for the sake of Jesus Christ. "Ye. . . took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in Heaven a better and an enduring substance." (Heb. x. 34.) They do not grieve at leaving the honours, because they always detested them, and reckoned them, as they indeed are, nothing but smoke and vanity; they esteemed loving God, and being loved by God, their only honour. They do not grieve at leaving their relations, because they have only loved them in God; when dying, they commend them to that Heavenly Father, who loves them more than they, and trusting to be saved, they hope to be able to help them more, when they are in Paradise, than while on this earth. Finally, what they have ever said in life, "My God and my all," they repeat, with greater consolation and tenderness, when dying.

He, therefore, who dies loving God, is not tormented by the fears which death brings with it; but, on the contrary, he is pleased with them, thinking that his life is now ended, and that there is no more time to suffer for God, and to offer Him any more proofs of his love. Then, lovingly and peacefully, he gives Him these last moments of his life, and consoles himself in uniting the sacrifice of his death with the sacrifice which Jesus Christ once offered for him on the cross to His eternal Father. And thus he joyfully expires, saying, "I will lay me down in peace and take my rest." (Ps. iv. 9.) Oh, what peace to die, given up to and reposing in the arms of Jesus Christ, Who has loved us even unto death, and was willing to endure a cruel death, to obtain a sweet and peaceful death for us.

Affections and Prayers

O my beloved Jesus, Who, to obtain a happy death for me, wast willing to die a death so bitter upon Calvary, when shall I behold Thee? The first time that I shall see Thee it will be as my Judge, in that same place in which I shall breathe forth my soul. And then what shall I say to Thee? What wilt Thou say to me? I will not wait until that time to think what I shall say. I will think now. I will say to Thee, My dear Redeemer, Thou art the same Who hast died for me. At one time I did offend Thee, I was ungrateful to Thee, and I did not deserve Thy pardon; but afterwards, being assisted by Thy grace, I repented, and during the remainder of my life, I have mourned because of my sins, and Thou hast pardoned me. Pardon me once more, now that I am at Thy feet, and do Thou Thyself give me a general absolution for my sins. I did not deserve to love Thee any more, for having despised Thy love; but Thou in Thy mercy hast drawn my heart to Thee, and if it has not loved Thee as Thou ought to be loved, at least, it has loved Thee above all other things, giving up everything in order to please Thee. Now what wilt Thou say to me? I can see, that Paradise and possessing Thee in Thy kingdom, is a blessing too great for me, but I cannot trust myself to live far from Thee, especially now, that Thou hast once let me see Thy beautiful and lovely face. Therefore, I seek to live in Paradise, not that I may be happy there, but that I may love Thee more.

And now, my beloved Judge, raise Thy hand and bless me, and tell me that I am Thine, and that Thou wilt be mine for ever. I would ever love Thee, do Thou ever love me. Have mercy upon a soul that loves Thee with all its strength, and longs to see Thee, so as to love Thee more.

Even thus do I hope, O my Jesus, do I hope then to speak to Thee. In the meantime, I pray Thee to grant me grace so to live that when dying, I may say to Thee that which I have just thought. Give me holy perseverance, and give me Thy love.

SECOND POINT

"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death." (Rev. xxi. 4.) Therefore, in death the Lord will wipe away from the eyes of His servants the tears which they have shed, living as they do in trouble, in fears, in dangers, and in battles with hell. What can be greater consolation to a soul that has loved God when death is announced, than the thought, that soon it will be freed from the many dangers that there are in this life of offending God, from the many stings of conscience, and from the temptations of the devil. This present life is a continual warfare with hell, in which we are in constant danger of losing our souls, and then our God. St. Ambrose tell us, that upon this earth we are ever walking amidst the snares of the enemy who lies in wait to rob us of the life of grace. It was this danger which caused St. Peter of Alcantara to say when dying to a religious who, when assisting him, touched him, "My brother, keep away from me, because I am still living and am yet in danger of being eternally lost!" It was this danger also that caused St. Teresa to be consoled each time that she heard the clock strike, rejoicing that another hour of warfare was passed, for she said, "At any moment of my life I may sin, and by doing so I may lose God." Therefore it is, that the saints are so rejoiced when death is "announced to them, knowing, as they do, that very soon their battles and their dangers will be ended, and that they, within a very short time, will reach that happy state when they will no longer be able to lose God.

It is related in the lives of the Fathers, that once when an aged Father was dying in Scythia, he laughed when the others wept; on being asked why he laughed, he answered, "Wherefore do you weep, knowing, as you do, that I am going to my rest?" Likewise, Catherine of Sienna,when she was dying, said, "Rejoice with me, for I am leaving this world of sorrows, and I am going to a place of rest." St. Cyprian observes, that if some one were living in a house, the walls of which were falling down, and the floors and roof were shaking, so that everything was threatening ruin, would not such an one be very desirous to quit that house? In this life, all things are threatening ruin to the soul, the world, hell, the passions, the rebellious senses; these all draw us on to sin and to everlasting death. The apostle exclaims, "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death ?" (Rom vii. 34.) Oh, what joy will the soul feel when it hears those

words, "Come with Me from Lebanon, My spouse, with Me from Lebanon. . . from the lions' dens." (Sol. Song iv. 8.) Come, my spouse, come from the place of tears, and from the dens of lions that are seeking to devour thee, and to make thee lose the Divine grace. Therefore St. Paul desiring death, said that Jesus Christ was his only life; and therefore, he thought that to die was his greatest gain, since, in dying, he obtained that life which has no end. "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (Phil. i. 21.)

It is a great favour which God grants to that soul that is in a state of grace to take it from this world, where, at any time, it may become changed, and may lose the friendship of God! "He was taken away lest wickedness should alter his understanding." (Wisd. iv. II.) Happy in this life is he who is united to God; but, like the sailor, who cannot be called safe until he has arrived in port, and is escaped from the tempest: even so, a soul cannot be called fully happy until it has departed this life in the favour of God.

Now, if it causes joy to the sailor when, after many dangers, he has almost safely arrived in port, how much more shall not he rejoice who is just on the point of securing eternal salvation? Besides, in this life it is impossible to live without committing sin, at least venial sin: "For a just man falleth seven times." (Prov. xxiv. 16.) He who is leaving this life, ceases to give offence to God. St. Ambrose asks, "What is death but the sepulchre of vice!" It is even this that makes death so desirable to the lovers of God. With this the venerable Vincent Caraffa consoled himself when dying, by saying, "When I cease to live, I shall cease to offend God." And St. Ambrose also said, "Wherefore do we desire this life, in which the longer any one lives the greater will be the burden of sins with which he is laden."

He who dies in the grace of God, is placed in a state in which he cannot, neither does he know how, to offend God. "The dead know not how to sin," remarks the same saint. Therefore the Lord praises the dead, more than any man living, although he may be a saint. "Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead, more than the living." (Eccles. iv. 2.) A certain good man ordered, that he, who should come to announce his death to him, should say, "Rejoice, because the time is come when thou shalt no more offend God."

Affections and Prayers

"Into Thy hands I commend my spirit, for Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, Thou God of truth." (Ps. xxxi. 5.) Ah, my sweet Redeemer, where should I have now been if Thou hadst allowed me to die when I was living far from Thee? I should now be in hell.where I could never love Thee more. I thank Thee for not having abandoned me, and for having granted me so many graces to win my heart to Thee. I am very sorry for having offended Thee. I love Thee above all things. I pray Thee ever to make me more sensible of the evil I have committed in despising Thee, and of the love which Thy Infinite Goodness deserves. I love Thee, and I would like soon to die if it be Thy holy will, in order to be freed from the danger of ever losing Thy holy grace, and to be sure of loving Thee for ever in eternity. Ah, during the years that may remain to me of my life give me strength, my beloved Jesus, to do something for Thee before death shall overtake me. Give me strength to withstand the temptations and passions, and especially against that passion which for the past time has most caused me to displease Thee. Give me patience in infirmity, and under the wrongs that I may receive from men. I now pardon, through Thy love, all who may have despised me, and I pray Thee to give them those graces which they may desire. Give me strength to be more diligent in avoiding even venial sins, concerning which I know that I am negligent. Help me, my Saviour, I hope for all things because of Thy merits.

THIRD POINT

Not only is death the end of our labours, but it is even the gate of life, as St. Bernard observes. He who wishes to enter in, and see God, must pass through this gate. "This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter into it." (Ps. cxviii. 20.) St. Jerome called out to death, and said, "Open to me, my sister." My sister, death, if thou dost not open the door, I cannot go in to enjoy my Lord. St. Charles Borromeo, having a painting in his house which represented a skeleton with a scythe in the hand, called for the painter, and ordered him to erase the scythe, and to paint a golden key; desiring by this, that the wish for death should ever be kindled in his heart, for death is that key which must open the gate of heaven for us to see God.

St. John Chrysostom observes, that if a king had prepared an apartment in his palace for some one, but for some time desired that person to live in a hovel, how much would he not desire to leave the hovel, and to go to the palace? The soul during this life being in the body, is as it were in a prison, from which she must pass to enter into the kingdom of heaven; therefore David prayed, saying, "Bring my soul out of prison." (Ps. cxlii.

9.) And the holy Simeon, when he had the Infant Jesus in his arms, sought for no other favour than death, so as to be freed from the prison of this life, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace." (S. Luke ii. 29.) S. Ambrose also says, "he seeks, as if he were held by necessity, to be dismissed." The Apostle also desired the same grace when he said, "having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ," (Phil. i. 23.)

What joy the cup-bearer of Pharaoh felt when he heard from Joseph, that he should soon be released from prison and should return to his post! And a soul that loves God, does it not rejoice when it hears that within a short time it will be released from the prison of this world, and will go to enjoy God? "Whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord." (2 Cor. v. 6.) Whilst we are united to the body, we are far from the sight of God ; as it were in a foreign land, and far from our own country; and therefore St. Bruno remarks, that our death ought not to be called death, but life. Hence the death of the saints is called their birth-day; yes, because when they die they are borne to that blessed life which will never have an end. St. Athanasius observes, that "the just die not, but are translated." To the just death is no other than the transition to eternal life. "O beautiful death," says St. Augustine, "and who is he that does not long for thee, seeing that thou art the end of all work the end of toil, and the beginning of eternal rest?" Therefore the saint earnestly prayed, saying, "May I die, O Lord, that I may see Thee."

St. Cyprian observes, that death must indeed be feared by the sinner, because he will pass from a temporal to an eternal death. "Let him fear to die who shall pass to the second death;" but he who is in the grace of God, does not fear death, because he will pass from death to an eternal life. In the life of St. John the Almoner it is related, that a certain rich man recommended his only son to the saint, and gave him much alms, so that the saint might obtain a long life for his son from God; but the son soon afterwards died. As the father was grieving over the death of his son, God sent an angel to him, who said, "Thou didst seek a long life for thy son; know that he is now enjoying it eternally in Paradise." This is the grace that Jesus Christ obtained for us, as it was promised in Hosea, "O death, I will be thy plague." (Hos. xiii. 14.) Jesus, in dying for us, made our death to become life. When Pionius the martyr was being borne to the scaffold, he was asked by those who led him, "How it was he could go so joyfully to death?" The saint made answer, " You deceive yourselves; I go not to death, but to life." Even thus was the youthful St. Symphorian encouraged by his mother when the time of his martyrdom drew nigh, "O my son, life is not taken away from thee; it is exchanged for a better."

Affections and Prayers

O God of my soul, for the time past I have dishonoured Thee, in turning away from Thee; but Thy Son has honoured Thee in sacrificing His life to Thee upon the Cross. Through the honour done to Thee by Thy dearly beloved Son, forgive the dishonour that I have done Thee. I am very sorry, O my Sovereign Good, for having offended Thee; and I promise from this day forward to love none other but Thee. I hope for my salvation from Thee. Whatever I have now that is good, is all of Thy mercy; I know that I receive it all from Thee: "By the grace of God I am what I am." (i Cor. xv. 10) If during the time past I have dishonoured Thee, I hope to honour Thee for ever in eternity in blessing Thee for Thy mercy. I feel a great desire to love Thee; but Thou givest me the desire; and I thank Thee for it, O Jesus, my Love. Continue, Oh, continue to help me, as Thou hast already done; for I hope from this day forward to be Thine, and Thine alone. I renounce all worldly pleasures; for what greater pleasure can I have than pleasing Thee, my Lord, Who art so lovely, and Who hast loved me so much? I only seek for love, O my God; and I hope ever to seek it from Thee; until dying in Thy love, I shall reach the kingdom of love, where, without asking any more for it, I shall be filled with love, and I shall never for one moment cease to love Thee, with all my strength, for ever in eternity.

Return to the Seventh Meditation . . . *Proceed to the Ninth Meditation*

Saints' Prayers

selected from the annals of history unto our current day

Meditations

Instructions on Meditation

from the book, 'Meditations for Advent and Easter'

How to Meditate

Preface

Meditation is one of the most essential and important duties of the spiritual life.

It is absolutely necessary for religious, it is almost necessary for seculars; but many persons who would profit exceedingly by this holy exercise, are deterred from practising it by imaginary difficulties, by supposing that it is only intended for those who have attained a high degree of perfection, or who are aiming at great sanctity; others, who really wish to practise meditation, because they think it pleasing to God, and who love Him too much to be afraid of any pains and trouble to themselves when there is a hope of doing His will more perfectly, are often in great difficulties, from not knowing how to commence the good work.

Unfortunately, many of the instructions and directions for meditation are far more suited to the comprehension of those who have made it for years, than of those who need to be taught in the simplest manner. We do not offer the following advice to those who have already made meditation for years, and from whom we would be only too glad to learn higher things; but for those who are beginning to practise meditation, either in the world or in the cloister.

And, first, let us consider what meditation is. To meditate means to think about anything. We are meditating all day long, for all day long we are thinking more or less intently on some subject.

If we are going on a journey, we meditate or think about it: (1) how we shall travel; (2) about the place we are going to; (3) about the friends we expect to meet when we arrive at our journey's end. Now, if we want to think about spiritual things, that is, to "make a meditation," we must just act in the same way.

For example, if we wish to make a meditation on heaven, we shall think: (1) how we can get there most surely and safely; (2) we shall try to recollect all that we have heard about it; (3) we shall think of the friends we expect to meet there. Ah! those are our best friends; for who was ever greeted at the end of the longest journey with one-half the love with which Jesus and Mary will greet us, when we reach our heavenly home?

Now, in the ordinary affairs of life, the more important the

subject is about which we are thinking, the more carefully we employ those three powers of our mind - our memory, our understanding, and our will. If we are thinking or meditating about a journey (to continue the illustration already used), we shall use our memory, to recall what we have read, or known from experience, about a similar undertaking; we shall use our understanding, to find out how far these recollections will help us in our present purpose; and we shall use our will, to will or determine what we intend to do.

We use these powers of soul constantly, and in the very order above-mentioned, every day of our lives; yet, when we are told to use them in meditation, we fancy it is something very difficult, simply because the terms are new to us by which what we have done and are doing every day is described.

See how we may use our memory, understanding, and will, when we meditate or think about heaven. We use our memory by remembering some text of Scripture, such as, "In my Father's house there are many mansions;" or some subject, such as our Lord Jesus sitting at the right hand of God the Father; and we try to picture to ourselves, i.e., to remember, or call to mind, all we have heard about heaven, its joys, its peace, its beauty, its everlastingness; then we use our understanding, by trying to understand or learn what may be profitable to us from this meditation.

We learn or understand from it, that what happens in time is of little consequence, because time is so short, and eternity so long; we learn that God has prepared such joys for us as no human heart can imagine, and that our one great object in life should be to prepare ourselves for these eternal joys.

Then we use our will, to will or resolve, with our whole hearts, to prepare for heaven, to live for heaven, to remove every obstacle, however great, which might prevent us from getting to heaven; and this brings us to the great end of meditation, mental prayer.

To many persons mental prayer sounds as terrible and difficult an undertaking as meditation; but as we trust meditation will no longer appear difficult, even to the most simple and unlearned, so we hope mental prayer will also appear easy and attractive. Mental prayer simply means praying in our minds. When we pray with our lips, so that a sound can be heard, we are using vocal prayer; when we pray in our hearts, so that no one but God can hear us, we are using mental prayer; and those very persons who are frightened at the idea of mental prayer, nevertheless often make it unconsciously.

Mental prayer is the end of meditation, because prayer is that which unites us most closely to God. We meditate or think about holy things, in order that our thinking may end in praying; even as we meditate or think about what we are going to do, that our thinking may end in doing.

All the planning and thinking about a journey would never take us a step on the road, unless we acted on what we thought; and all the acting might end very badly, if we acted without thinking or meditating beforehand. And if we should consider a person very foolish who undertook any important duty or occupation - who began to build a house, or set out on a journey, without having thought of what they were going to do - how much more foolish should we consider those who never think about those duties which are of the greatest importance - about that journey which cannot be performed a second time, to repair the errors of the first!

We cannot over-estimate the importance of daily meditation.

There are few persons in the world so occupied that they could not give ten minutes every day to this duty. Ten minutes for God, leaves twenty-three hours and three-quarters for the world and self. But some may object that they hear Mass daily, and hence really cannot give more time to devotion. Why not make a little meditation at the commencement of Mass?

No one knows what the soul gains in stability of purpose and in help for daily needs, until they have tried giving even ten minutes a day regularly to meditation.

It would be impossible here to enter into all the reasons for this assertion, but two may be briefly mentioned: first, it forms a habit of leading the mind to think of God; and second, the daily consideration of the various circumstances in our divine Lord's life, even for a few moments, leads the soul on insensibly to love Him more and more.

But the more beneficial meditation is to us, the more the devil will try to prevent us from attempting it; and if we do attempt it, to prevent us from continuing it steadily. He will persuade us to omit it on any possible excuse, but we must be prepared for this, and determine not to allow excuses. He will try to distract us, to make us feel weary; nay, even to inspire us with an utter disgust for it; so that we shall be almost amazed ourselves at our dislike, and at finding that we would rather do anything in the world than think of God for a few minutes.

Further, he will allow us to enjoy devotion at other times; but at the precise time when we ought to make our meditation, it will seem actually distasteful. Souls have been tried thus for years, even in the cloister, even at the times appointed for devotion to the most holy Sacrament. For this trial there is only one remedy: a firm determination to make our meditation, or our visit to the blessed Sacrament, at the time appointed, and for the time appointed. Happy they who persevere until death in resisting this temptation! Even if the whole time of meditation is spent in dryness and distraction, there is a grace, above all, there is a strength, which may be felt, and is felt, by the faithful soul; and even one omission, one meditation yielded to the tempter, leaves a weakness of soul that may not be recovered for many days.

We shall conclude with what we hope may be useful to beginners.

SIMPLE DIRECTIONS FOR MEDITATION

1. Read over a part of the meditation you intend to make at night, and try to think of it when you awake in the morning. This is called remote preparation.

2. Fix a time for your meditation as early in the morning as possible; commence it by trying to recollect yourself, and by saying the Veni Creator, or, if your time for meditation is very short, say only one verse of that hymn. Remember that the Holy Spirit alone can teach you to pray, so you should be very earnest in invoking His help.

3. Then read over the meditation carefully; when you have done so, exercise your memory by thinking of the subject, your understanding by trying to enter into it, and your will by making acts of faith, hope, charity, etc. Remember, however, that mental prayer is the great end of meditation; and if the Holy Spirit helps you to pray at once, do not wait to think, but begin to pray. For example, if your meditation is on heaven, when you have read it over, or even a few lines of it, if you feel inclined to rest, quietly, as it were, thinking how happy it will be, how blessed it will be to see Jesus, etc., do so as long as you feel inclined; but if the first thought makes you wish to pray that you may love God more, who has loved you so much as to prepare such great things for you, then pray during the whole time.

4. When the time is nearly ended, try to form a good resolution,

and put it in the Heart of Jesus or Mary.

5. Then thank God for the graces He has given you, by saying some little vocal prayer, and conclude all with a very brief examination of conscience about the meditation only; asking yourself, first, if you tried to be faithful to the time appointed; and secondly, if you did your best to make a good use of it. It is very advisable, also, at the commencement of a meditation, particularly where twenty minutes or half an hour can be devoted to it, to offer it for some special purpose, and to request some special grace by it; such as to offer it to our Lord to obtain the grace of patience, resignation, meekness, obedience, recollection, etc., and to ask Him to give us an increase of this grace by the meditation. But the great thing is earnestness; to commence with fervently imploring the help of the Holy Spirit, and with a firm purpose to resist all distractions, and not to let the time slip over us idly.

Alas! what do we not lose every day in our devotions by want of earnestness! If ten minutes or half an hour were given us every day to collect gold-dust, how hard we should labour for the time appointed! Shall we not also labour as fervently for a heavenly treasure?

Do not let us make a scruple of omitting the time of meditation, and no scruple at all of wasting it. Even in sickness, and in very severe sickness, we might gain incalculable benefit by a few moments' thought of God, at or near the time when we usually made our meditation.

If we cannot think, we might say one Hail Mary, or one verse of a hymn; and when our illness is not so severe as to prevent us from exerting our minds a little, even though from weakness we may be unable to meditate, we might find great help and comfort in reading a few words of a spiritual book; nor should those who are really and constantly suffering, make any scruple of substituting spiritual reading, which generally ends in meditation, for the more exact meditation which should be made under ordinary circumstances.

To love God more is the end of our life; and how shall we love Him if we do not think of Him, and converse with Him, so as to know Him more and more?

Convent Of Poor Clares,

Kenmare, Co. Kerry,

Feast of the Patronage of our Lady, 1865.

Saints' Prayers

selected from the annals of history unto our current day

Meditations

Meditations for Advent and Easter

by the author of "Meditations for Lent," "St. Francis and the Franciscans," "The Life and Revelations of S. Gertrude," Etc. Etc.

Meditation I - *Especially for Advent Sunday*

The Heart of the Infant Jesus, Our Coming Light

"Behold, the Lord cometh, and all His saints with Him; and in that day there shall be a great light." All. Ant. at Lauds.

"And the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day when the Lord shall bind up the wound of His people, and shall heal the stroke of their wound." (Is. xxx. 26.)

1st Prelude. - Represent to yourself the Heart of the Infant Jesus in the womb of Mary as a flame of clear and beautiful light coming to enlighten all nations. Represent also to yourself the terrible light of the second coming, which will be open and manifest to all.

2nd Prelude. - Pray that you may be so enlightened by the light of the first coming, that you may not be terrified by the light of the second coming.

1st Point. - Look at the Heart of the Infant Jesus. It lies hidden in the womb of Mary, even as his blessed Humanity will be hidden hereafter in

the tabernacle. Oh, what a holy, beautiful, peaceful light is the light of the Infant Heart of Jesus! How it longs to come forth and manifest itself to all, to console, to instruct, to illuminate! Are we, also, longing to receive this light? Are we praying with our whole hearts that it may come to us, and that we may be prepared to receive it? However great our spiritual enlightenment may be, we are still, in some measure, "sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death." But the light is coming; already we can see the dawn upon the mountain. When Mary was born, the first ray of light tinged the eastern sky; when Jesus was born, the light of this mystic moon was as the light of the true sun, because of her perfect union with Him; and the light of the sun was sevenfold, as the light of seven days. The light was sevenfold; that is, the light was perfect, for it was the light of God.

2nd Point. - Let us beseech the Infant Jesus to enlighten us in that particular way in which we most need light. We are all "born blind" through the sin of our parents; and, unhappily, though we have obtained light in the waters of baptism, we too often, by our own fault, relapse into blindness more or less intense. Sometimes we do not wish to see the sin we should forsake, or the virtue we should practise, because it would cost us something to act upon this light; sometimes we profit so little by the light, that it is withdrawn from us, or it is not imparted in the fullness and brightness with which more faithful souls are favoured. There are souls in whom the light of God shines so brightly, that they cannot commit the shadow of an imperfection without perceiving it immediately; there are souls in whom that light shines so resplendently, that they see even the shadow of an imperfect motive in the best action they perform. Why should we not be thus favoured? It is not because the light is unwilling to come, but because we are unwilling to receive it.

3rd Point. - What shall we do to obtain this great grace? Let us go to Mary. Let us devote our Advent to Mary. Let us consecrate every thought, word, and action to Mary during this holy season; and then, on the blessed Christmas morning, she will herself place her Infant in our arms; nay, rather, she will lay Him down to rest in our hearts; and He is so obedient to His sweet mother, that He will never stir from the heart wherein she places Him, unless she comes to take Him away. Surely we will not oblige her to do so? Advent should be a time of special devotion to Mary. Jesus again lies mystically in her womb. Again she pleads unweariedly for her people, as she pleaded in that blessed Advent when He took flesh of her flesh, and bone of her bone. Oh, let us kneel before her now as we would have knelt before her then, and implore her to intercede for us with Jesus, to obtain for us that He may indeed be our

light, and that we may never be of the number of those who prefer darkness. Then, indeed, may we hope that the light of His second coming will be a light of glory to us, and not a light of condemnation.

Aspiration. - Come and enlighten us, O sweet Infant Jesus.

Form your resolution, and place it in the Heart of the Infant Jesus. Examen of Meditation.

Proceed to the Second Meditation

Saints' Prayers

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Meditations

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by the author of "Meditations for Lent," "St. Francis and the Franciscans," "The Life and Revelations of S. Gertrude," Etc. Etc.

Meditation II - *Monday*

The Heart of the Infant Jesus, Our Coming King

"Lift up thine eyes, O Jerusalem, and behold the mighty King." Ant. at Magnificat.

"The Lord shall be king over all the earth." (Zach. xiv. 9.)

1st Prelude. - Represent to yourself the Infant Jesus as a king coming now to deliver, and as a king coming hereafter to judge.

2nd Prelude. - Pray that you may be one of the faithful subjects of this King, so that you may not be punished hereafter with His enemies.

1st Point. - Consider the throne of this Infant King. It is in the heart of Mary, the only human heart in which He was ever permitted to reign supremely. Oh, how we should love that heart, how we should honour it, grander and more magnificent than the ivory throne of Solomon, "overlaid with the finest gold" (3 Kings, x. 18); fairer and more beautiful than his litter of the wood of Libanus, with "its pillars of silver, its seat of gold, its going up of purple, and the midst covered with charity for the daughters of Jerusalem" (Cant. iii. 10); for there is no charity like the charity of the heart of Mary, and there our Infant Jesus rules! Oh, let us go and adore Him there! Let us fall prostrate before Him, "the Lord, the coming King. O let us adore." Let us offer our homage to Him through the heart of Mary; let us kneel in spirit at the foot of this "ivory throne," from whence none are repulsed. Here every petition will be received; here we shall find our best and surest advocate with the King.

2nd Point. - But Jesus will not always remain on this fair throne of ivory. He seeks no litter of purple for His repose. Alas! has He not come to die on a couch covered with purple - the purple garment of His most precious blood? But when sweet Jesus comes forth from the heart of Mary, He will seek for other hearts wherein to reign. Shall we not offer Him ours? nay, rather, should we not implore Him to accept them? Oh, let us prepare our hearts to be His throne! He is coming forth from a heart which never gave Him a moment's pain, from a heart where all was subject to His rule, from a heart which never caused Him to shed a tear of pain, or to breathe a sigh of anguish; and He is coming to hearts who will treat Him with coldness, with indifference - alas! O my God, that it should be true - to hearts who will treat Him with ingratitude, with cruelty, who will even dare to hate Him. O sweet Infant Jesus, how Thou must love us, when Thou willest to leave that gentle, tender heart for those cruel and wicked ones!

3rd Point. - Consider the gentleness of this Infant King. He comes as the Prince of peace. Oh! surely we will endeavour to drive all His enemies far away. How could we bear that our young Prince should be disturbed and molested! Surely, from very love of His infant gentleness, we will use every effort to prepare our hearts for His reign, and we shall take care that He rules undisturbed. There shall be no cruel Herod to drive Him away, to seek the young Child's life. Alas! if unhappily we should be guilty of mortal sin, we would seek His life. But we will take care that no rumour of fear shall reach Him, that no imperfection, if possible, at least

that no deliberate venial sin, shall disturb Him. Alas! if we do not permit Him to reign now in our hearts as the King of peace, He will reign hereafter as the King of vengeance. But if we are His faithful subjects now, oh, what joys and glories He will prepare for us when He calls us to heaven, His kingdom, for eternal ages!

Aspiration. - Come and reign over us, O sweet Infant Jesus.

Form your resolution, and place it in the Heart of the Infant Jesus. Examen of Meditation.

Return to the First Meditation . . . *Proceed to the Third Meditation*

Saints' Prayers

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Meditations

Meditations for Advent and Easter

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Meditation III - *Tuesday*

The Heart of the Infant Jesus, Our Coming Lawgiver

"He will teach us His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for the law shall come forth from Sion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." (Is. ii. 3.) 1st Lesson at Matins.

1st Prelude. - Represent to yourself the Infant Jesus as your lawgiver.

2nd Prelude. - Pray earnestly that you may have grace to obey all His precepts.

1st Point. - Consider the office and authority of a lawgiver. It implies a power to command, and a power to enforce the execution of commands. Our Infant Jesus comes now to fulfil the former of these functions; He will come a second time to compel the latter. Jesus comes now to give us laws, to explain them, and to exemplify in His own person how we should practise them. He tells us to be meek and lowly of heart; He explains to us the nature of this meekness and lowliness, and He practises the lesson He teaches, so that we can have no excuse if we refuse to obey the law. We cannot complain that we do not understand what has been fully explained; we cannot complain that we are not able to do what another has done. And thus has our dear Infant Jesus explained and practised every precept which He has given. What excuse, then, can we find for disobedience?

2nd Point. - "He will teach us His ways." We must not follow our own ways any longer. The ways of the Infant Jesus may be difficult to learn at first, but let us remember they are the ways of a God. Oh! let us cry out to Him with our whole hearts, "Teach me Thy ways." His ways are not like our ways. Our ways are the ways of ignorance, the ways of sin, the ways of short-sighted mortals; the ways of the Infant Jesus are the ways of eternal wisdom, the ways of perfect holiness, the ways of an omniscient God. Let us weep before Him that we have so long followed our own ways, that we have been so fearfully bent on them, to our own destruction, had not His mercy saved us. But we must also "walk in His paths." All that He teaches us to do, He has already practised. The lawgivers of this world may coldly and sternly give laws which they never intend to keep themselves; they may write their laws in blood, in the blood of those whom they drive to sin and desperation by cruel enactments - but it is not so with Jesus. He is the first, the only lawgiver who keeps His own precepts before He asks others to keep them; and if His laws were written in blood, it is His own Blood, His own most precious Blood, which He has shed even while yet an Infant, to atone for the transgressions which He knew we would commit against the blessed, holy, peaceful laws He came to enact. Was there ever a lawgiver who died to atone for the sins which would be committed against His laws, who suffered death because justice must have its due, and preferred to suffer instead of the guilty?

3rd Point. - O my Saviour, my sweet Infant Jesus, teach me. I will try to listen meekly, to obey faithfully. My sweet little Lawgiver, I cannot bear

to think that Thou shouldst suffer because I will sin - because I will to sin. Oh, take my will from me - my wicked will - since it causes Thee so much suffering! I give Thee up my will: oh, give me Thine in exchange! I will listen for Thy lowest whisper. I will hear and obey Thy voice in the duties of my state, in the requirements of my holy Rule, in the slightest intimation of the wish of my Superior. O my sweet Infant Lawgiver, I will be so anxious to obey Thee, that I will consider even the slightest intimation of Thy will as a treasure, above all when it contradicts my own; and I will seek for Thy footsteps, and walk in Thy paths, the paths of lowly, unasking obedience, the paths which lead to Paradise, whither Thou wilt bring me, O my Infant Love; where there will be no law but love, and where love will never be grieved or disobeyed.

Aspiration. - Sweet Infant Jesus, rule me and guide me for ever.

Form your resolution, and place it in the Heart of the Infant Jesus. Examen of Meditation.

Return to the Second Meditation . . . *Proceed to the Fourth Meditation*

Saints' Prayers

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Meditations

Meditations for Advent and Easter

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Meditation IV - *Wednesday*

The Heart of the Infant Jesus, Our Coming Prince

"And the Lord said to me: This gate shall be shut: it shall not be opened, and no man shall pass through it: because the Lord the God of Israel hath entered in by it, and it shall be shut for the Prince." (Ezech. xliv. 2.) Response, 2nd Lesson at Matins.

1st Prelude. - Represent to yourself the vision of Ezechiel, and behold Mary, the closed gate through whom none but the Prince may enter.

2nd Prelude. - Pray that when Jesus enters into your heart, in the adorable Sacrament of His love, you may close its gate, and that none but the Prince may enter therein.

1st Point. - Consider the magnificence of the types which prefigure the advent of Jesus, and the glories of Mary. What more majestic, what more sublime, than this type of the Eastern gate, which the Prince alone might enter, and which was shut for all others! Well might the holy Fathers of the Church love to linger on the grand prophetic page. Mary opens the gate of her womb, Jesus comes forth, and it is closed for ever-closed for the Prince, for the sanctuary of the All Holy may not be defiled by mortal touch. Let us approach that golden gate; let us kneel before it. The Prince is within, still mystically hidden in its embraces; but the gate, the golden gate, is always accessible, and we may speak through it to the Prince. O Infant Prince, alas! that when the golden door opens, and Thou goest forth from the shelter of that temple, it will be to suffer, to die!

2nd Point. - But there is also a golden door by which Jesus enters into our hearts - a golden moment when our Infant Prince asks admittance. Shall we keep Him waiting? shall we refuse to admit Him? shall we make delays and excuses! We may have done so heretofore, but now we will do so no longer. O come, sweet Jesus, come! We will have one golden gate also, by which the Prince alone shall enter. If others must have places in our hearts, they must enter by side doors, which we shall watch carefully, and seldom open; but the gate, the golden entrance of our hearts, shall be open for the Prince alone. Oh, marvel of all marvels, that He should condescend to enter therein! Oh, grief of all griefs, that we should so neglect this royal guest, whom it should be our glory and our joy to entertain with the tenderest affection and the deepest reverence!

3rd Point. - Let us take Mary for our model in receiving Jesus, and in entertaining Jesus. He predestinated us before all eternity to be His own, even as He predestinated Mary to be His mother. He prepared graces for us, even as He prepared graces for her. And as He prepared for her that grace of graces, to which none other might aspire; as He made that

golden gate for Himself as an entrance to the sanctuary of her body, in which He dwelt; so has He prepared the golden gate of the most holy Sacrament, that He may thereby enter into us, and abide corporally with us, while millions are denied this unspeakable favour. Have we ever considered what we owe to God for His providence in permitting us to be of the number of His children, into whom He enters, with whom He unites Himself in the adorable Sacrament? Have we ever made the thanksgiving we ought to make for this stupendous favour? Oh! let us try to realize what this favour is, and then we shall be more likely to keep the golden door closed for the Prince, to let none other even approach it; for what can be worthy of sharing our love with God Himself? what sacrifice can be too great to offer in thanksgiving for the honour of the Prince's presence?

Aspiration. - O sweet Infant Jesus, my Prince, enter into my heart, and close the door, that none else may enter therein.

Form your resolution, and place it in the Heart of the Infant Jesus. Examen of Meditation.

Return to the Third Meditation . . . *Proceed to the Fifth Meditation*

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Meditation V - *Thursday*

The Heart of the Infant Jesus, Our Coming Saviour

"But I will look towards the Lord, I will wait for God my Saviour: my God will hear me." (Micheas, vii. 7.) Ant. at Magnificat.

1st Prelude. - Behold the Infant Jesus coming forth from the womb of Mary as our Saviour.

2nd Prelude. - Pray that you may obtain the full benefit of the salvation He is about to accomplish.

1st Point. - Consider the meaning of the word saviour, and what it implies. It implies danger from which deliverance is needed; it means the deliverer. The danger is sin; the danger is eternal ruin; and so great is the danger, that only a God can be the deliverer. Oh, how that Lord has loved His creatures! Their danger did not lessen His security; their ruin could not shake His stability; and yet He cannot rest in His security, or repose in His stability, without coming Himself to save and to give rest to His creatures. Well may we "look towards" the Lord. If we were perishing in a torrent, with what eagerness would we not look towards a deliverer who appeared on the bank of the river, hastening to our assistance! With what hope, with what love we should gaze upon him! and if we knew that he could certainly save us, with what faith we would expect him!

2nd Point. - In Advent we should unite ourselves with the whole Church in expecting our Deliverer. We should offer up ceaseless acts of faith in His power, of confidence in His love, and of hope in His goodness. Perhaps our deliverance will be proportioned to our earnestness in preparing for it. Above all, we should unite ourselves with Mary. Her spotless purity, her burning love, her perfect faith, her ceaseless tears and intercedings, brought the Messiah from heaven, whom her nation had so long desired. Then let us offer our desires of deliverance in union with hers. Let us unite ourselves to her faith, her hope, and her charity in expecting Jesus. Let us beseech Him to accept her sublime acts of virtue in atonement for our coldness, and for her sake to "come and deliver us." He can refuse nothing to her prayers whose love won Him from heaven to earth. If we desire to obtain special favours and graces at Christmas, let us be devout to Mary; let us ask all through her in Advent. She is the tabernacle before which we should pray, and none ever knelt before her in vain.

3rd Point. - Let us endeavour to ascertain the special danger from which we should ask individually to be delivered. In the order of grace, as in the

order of nature, there is some special disease to which we are predisposed, and which will prove our ruin, if we do not watch its symptoms and check its progress. How carefully and anxiously we watch the disease by which we think ourselves endangered! how we guard against all that might excite it or increase it! and then, if the least danger is apprehended, how quickly we consult the physician, how implicitly we abide by his directions! Would to God we were one-half as anxious about the constitutional malady of our souls. But let us begin now; let us consult our spiritual physicians, employ the remedies they prescribe, and occupy ourselves during this Advent in imploring our coming Saviour to deliver us from this malady, whose danger He knows better than we can.

Aspiration. - Heart of my Infant Jesus, come and deliver me.

Form your resolution, and place it in the Heart of the Infant Jesus. Examen of Meditation.

Return to the Fourth Meditation . . . *Proceed to the Sixth Meditation*

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Meditation VI - *Friday*

The Heart of the Infant Jesus, Our Coming Purifier

"And one of the Seraphim flew to me, and in his hand was a live coal, which he had taken with the tongs off the altar. And he touched my mouth, and said : Behold, this hath touched thy lips, and thy iniquities shall be taken away, and thy sin cleansed." (Is. vi. 6, 7.) 2nd Lesson at Matins.

1st Prelude. - Represent to yourself the subject of Isaias' vision: he "saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and elevated, and His train filled the temple." The Seraphim attend Him, and cry one to the other: "Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God of hosts, all the earth is full of His glory."

2nd Prelude. - Pray that you may be so purified as to adore this God of hosts worthily.

1st Point. - Consider the Infant Jesus as our Purifier. He comes that He may touch our lips, not with a live coal from the altar of sacrifice, but with Himself, the Victim of sacrifice. Even as the Seraphim adored trembling, and uttering in this marvellous vision the Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, which never ceases before the eternal throne, so did they tremble and adore uttering the same canticle of adoration as they knelt before Mary, when Jesus sat upon the royal throne of her royal womb. And yet we can dare to approach that majesty without fear and without adoration. Advent should be for us a special time of purification. We should purify ourselves to receive our newborn King at Christmas; we should purify ourselves to prepare for the coming of that King, no longer as an Infant and a purifier, but as a judge and a dispenser of justice. Oh, let us seek to have our lips now so purified by the Sacrifice of the Altar, that they may be worthy of the eternal entrance of our coming Bridegroom!

2nd Point. - Consider the words of this lesson: "They cried one to another, Holy, holy, holy." Thus, also, should we cry to each other, by our words and our example, Holy, holy, holy. Our God is holy; we must be holy. Our God is holy; we are His children; children must be like their father. Our God who is coming to us is a holy God; He cannot love iniquity; He will turn away from us if He finds we are not in earnest in endeavouring to deliver ourselves from sin - from that sin from which He is coming at such a cost to release us. We must give each other good examples - examples of fervour, examples of charity, examples of devotion - crying out one to another, "The Holy One is coming; let us prepare to meet Him."

3rd Point. - We need two kinds of purification. When the Seraph touched the lips of the Prophet, he said: "Thy iniquities shall be taken away, and thy sin shall be cleansed." Our Infant Jesus is coming to touch our lips with the kiss of peace, that He may impart this twofold purification. First, He will cleanse all our past sins, that is, He will "take away our iniquities;" and we must prepare for this by a good confession, a fervent contrition, and worthy penance. Oh, how earnestly and specially we ought to prepare for our Christmas confession! Jesus is coming to take away our sins; it is but little He asks us to do to obtain so great a grace. Secondly, He will purify us by cleansing us from our daily imperfections and faults, and for this we must prepare by commencing now to observe our resolutions with great fidelity, so that our sweet Jesus may find only such imperfections as are almost inevitable to human frailty.

Aspiration. - O my sweet Infant Jesus, touch my lips and my heart, and purify me more and more.

Form your resolution, and place it in the Heart of the Infant Jesus. Examen of Meditation.

Return to the Fifth Meditation . . . *Proceed to the Seventh Meditation*

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Meditation VII - *Saturday*

The Heart of the Infant Jesus, the Mystic Dew

"Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain the just: let the earth be opened, and bud forth a saviour." (Is. xlv. 8.)

1st Prelude. - Consider your Infant Jesus coming down from heaven as a gentle dew, to fertilize the earth; watering the earth, which is Mary, and budding forth as a Saviour.

2nd Prelude. - Pray that sweet Jesus may drop dew upon your soul, as a mystic earth, and bud forth salvation in your heart.

1st Point. - Consider the magnificence and beauty of this simile. . . The dew drops gently from heaven; and by this mystic dew we may understand the Divinity of Jesus. It comes from heaven, but descends to earth. It comes from above, but it falls, like long-expected rain, into the womb of Mary. And Mary is the earth, the mystic earth, into which the Divinity descends, that by the power of that Divinity, which alone could operate so great a marvel, it may bud forth a Saviour. O thrice holy Dew! O thrice blessed Earth! The earth - that is, the soul of Mary - has pined, and longed, and prayed for that Dew. The ardour of her desires has brought it down from heaven. Again and again she cried as none ever had cried, or will yet cry: "For Thee my soul hath thirsted; for Thee my flesh, O how many ways!" (Ps. lxii. 2.) She thirsted for her God, not alone that her own soul might be filled, but that her people might be refreshed by the living waters. She looked out upon the world, parched and dried by the scorching fires of sin and lust, and she cried to God that He would come and deliver His people; and for her sake He came.

2nd Point. - As the first man Adam was formed from the earth, so the second man also would be formed from the virgin earth, Mary. He drops His Divinity, as dew, into her womb in the silence of the night, that the bud of His Humanity may germinate therein. He comes with the silence of dew. His descent into her womb was hidden and noiseless; and thus His grace comes even now, as a soft and silent dew, into the hearts of His chosen ones. Oh, how earnestly we should pray that this mystic dew of grace may descend into our hearts! How earnestly we should cry out, "For Thee my soul hath thirsted; for Thee my flesh, O how many ways!" and when the dew of grace has softened and fertilized us, then we may hope that Christ will be found within us, and that our life may become so one with His, that He may indeed be our life.

3rd Point. - If we desire this mystic Dew, if we wish that Jesus should germinate in us, by assimilating our life to His, let us seek this favour and grace through Mary. Let us seek to be like her in our lives, if we desire in our measure to be like her in her favours. Her heart was prepared for this Dew; it was calm, loving, and full of desire to obtain it; and when the Dew descended into that virgin earth, O how faithfully she corresponded with all the fertility it effected! It is the quality of dew to refresh and fertilize; let us pray that we may obtain all that our coming Saviour desires to give.

Aspiration. - Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain the just.

Form your resolution, and place it in the Heart of the Infant Jesus. Examen of Meditation.

Return to the Sixth Meditation . . . *Proceed to the Eighth Meditation*

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Meditation VIII - *Sunday*

The Heart of Jesus, the Flower of the Root of Jesse

"And there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of his root. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him." (Is. xi. 1, 2.) 1st Lesson at Matins.

"Blessed is he that shall not be scandalized in Me." (Mat. xi. 6.) Gospel for second Sunday in Advent.

1st Prelude. - Represent to yourself the Infant Jesus as a flower budding in the womb of Mary.

2nd Prelude. - Pray that you may love and cherish this Flower, and that it may be planted in your heart.

1st Point. - Consider the words of the Prophet: "And there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of his root. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him." Already Mary is recorded in the prophetic page, even as she has already been predestinated in the eternal counsels as the Mother of Jesus. She is the rod of the root of Jesse, the rod which bears this mystic Flower. The stem which supports the flower always corresponds in grace and beauty to the flower which it bears. How beautiful, then, is the stem Mary, which bears the Flower Jesus. O most favoured stem! O most holy Flower! The stem nourishes and gives life to the flower. Humanly speaking, the stem is necessary to the flower. Mary nourishes and gives life to Jesus; the sap of this stem, that is, the blood of Mary, forms the sacred Humanity of the Flower Jesus. How we should reverence that stem! how we should honour it! how we should strive to protect it from the blasts of dishonour! how we should water it with tears of love and devotion!

2nd Point. - The rod - Mary springs from the root of Jesse. "Of this man's seed, God, according to His promise, hath raised up to Israel a Saviour, Jesus." (Acts, xiii. 23.) Mary springs from a royal and a holy stock; but while the progenitors usually ennoble the scion of a royal house, the scion here ennobles her progenitors. Mary need not glory that she is of the race of David, but David will glory, to all eternity, that Mary sprang from his root. Oh, how deeply this root had entered into the bed of humility, since its branches ascend so high! How great its stability, since it supports a God! How marvellous its fertility, since it produces the Author of creation. Let us bow down in lowly homage before this plant, and adore its Flower, who has called Himself the "Flower of the field, and the Lily of the valley;" the flower of the fertile field of Mary's virginity, the lily of the deep valley of her most profound humility.

3rd Point. - Let us beware lest we should be "scandalized" at the lowliness of this Flower. Our Lord Himself gives us this warning in to-day's Gospel: "Blessed is he that shall not be scandalized in Me." Alas! what fear there is that we may take scandal at Jesus, when Jesus Himself considered it necessary to pronounce a benediction on those who were not scandalized in Him. We are scandalized in Him when we question the wisdom of His providences and the love of His providences; we are scandalized in Him when we fail to appreciate the greatness of His humility and the beauty of His meekness. The world of heresy is scandalized in Him, because it will not stoop to honour her whom He has stooped so low to exalt. Let us beware lest we should fail, even in the least degree, in the honour due to the stem of Jesse. Let us pray that this Flower may be transplanted into our hearts by her blessed hands, and let us water it with our tears, and cherish it with our love. Then we may hope that the Spirit of the Lord will also rest on us, and fill us with His sevenfold gifts.

Aspiration. - Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain the just.

Form your resolution, and place it in the Heart of the Infant Jesus.
Examen of Meditation.

Return to the Seventh Meditation . . . *Proceed to the Ninth Meditation*

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Meditation IX - *Monday*

The Heart of the Infant Jesus Coming to Deliver the Captives

"He hath sent Me to preach to the meek, to heal the contrite of heart, and to preach a release to the captives, and deliverance to them that are shut up." (Is. lxi. 1.) Ant. at Mag.

1st Prelude. - Represent to yourself the Infant Jesus coming as a deliverer, and the King Jesus coming as a judge.

2nd Prelude. - Pray that you may so prepare each year for the anniversary of His first coming, as to be enabled to meet Him at His second coming without fear.

1st Point. - Consider the mission of the Infant Jesus. He comes to preach, to heal, to release, to deliver. Our divine Lord Himself declared these were the characteristics and the proofs of His mission. When John the Baptist sent his disciples to ask if He was the one who was "to come," Jesus proved that He was indeed the long-expected Messiah by His works. They were to go and relate to John what they had seen and heard; the miracles which they had seen performed; and the gospel which they had heard preached. And now our sweet Infant Jesus is coming again, as it were, on the same work, the same mission. He will preach to us by His example; He will preach humility by His lowliness, He will preach silence by His speechlessness, He will preach charity by His surpassing exercise of that sublime virtue, He will preach love of Mary by His own conduct towards His blessed Mother. And if we are "meek" we shall hear Him and obey Him. The little Infant Jesus has not come to confound the proud, to silence the boaster, to humble the haughty; this will be His work at another coming, when He will manifest His power. Now He comes only to manifest His mercy. Oh, let us pray for meekness, the meekness and simplicity of little children, that we may rightly hear and obey the preaching of this little Child!

2nd Point. - He comes to heal. O successful Physician, who is both the adviser and the remedy. We need not fear, however deep our wounds may be, however long they may have rankled and festered, the little Infant Jesus has a cure for all; one drop of His Infant blood can heal the most inveterate and long-standing sore. Let us no longer complain of our imperfections, of our temptations, of our difficulties, of our weakness. Here is a remedy which cannot fail. All through this blessed Advent, let

us kneel in spirit before Mary, the tabernacle where Jesus reposes, and pray to Him to come and heal us, and He will come, and our healing will be perfected in proportion to the depth of our contrition, for He has come to heal the contrite of heart.

3rd Point. - He comes to release the captives. Oh! let us never forget that there is another day coming - a day of exceeding fear - a day of agonizing dread; a day when Jesus will come, not to release, but to bind; not to deliver, but to shut up. And this day will be anticipated for us by the day of our death. The year is fast passing away. Can we tell if we shall live to see the close of another? Are we sure that this terrible day will not come to us before another Advent? If we have prepared for it, and it does not come, shall we be any the worse? If we have not prepared for it, and it does come, what will be our terror and dismay! Oh! let us run to our Infant Jesus, and beseech Him to release us now from sin, that we may not be bound eternally by it.

Aspiration. - O sweet Infant Jesus, come and heal us, come and deliver us.

Form your resolution, and place it in the Heart of the Infant Jesus.
Examen of Meditation.

Return to the Eighth Meditation . . . *Proceed to the Tenth Meditation*

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Meditation X - *Tuesday*

The Heart of the Infant Jesus Sending a Messenger to Prepare His Way

"The voice of one crying in the desert: Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the wilderness the paths of our God." (Is. xl. 3.) Ant. at Mag.

1st Prelude. - Represent to yourself the great Prophet announcing the coming of Jesus.

2nd Prelude. - Pray that you may profit by all the messages of grace which Jesus sends you.

1st Point. - Consider the exceeding love of Jesus in sending a messenger to prepare His way. When earthly monarchs undertake a journey to a distant part of their dominions, they send messengers before them. These messengers are charged to provide for all their comforts, to remove every obstacle to their advancement, to warn the people of their approach, that they may conceal all that would prove offensive to royal eyes, to banish all semblance of sorrow, to command public rejoicings. But our sweet Infant Jesus has no such purpose in sending messengers before His face. Oh, no. His messenger is not charged to see to His comforts, for our coming King, our sweet Infant Jesus, has renounced all comforts. His messenger is not commanded to put out of sight such objects of sorrow and distress as would prove an annoyance to an earthly monarch. No; the messengers of our sweet Jesus were desired to assemble the unhappy and the miserable, to make the most unhappy and the most miserable the most welcome; for our Infant Prince is content to suffer all manner of afflictions Himself, if He can only console one of the poorest of His subjects.

2nd Point. - Consider the messengers whom the Infant King employs. Before His first coming He sends the Baptist; but Jesus is always sending messengers before His face, for He is always coming to His people with some new grace, some new mercy, some new kindness. How many messengers has He sent you this year, and how did you receive His messengers? When He came, was the way prepared? He sent you a messenger of warning, by the flight of time, at the close of last year; a messenger of recollection, by a short retreat; a messenger of remembrance of His passion, in Lent; a messenger of remembrance of

His love, at Easter. He sent you, perhaps, messengers to say earth was not your home, by sickness and suffering, by kind trials, by temptations, by wise and loving admonitions. He sent you messengers of daily graces, which, perhaps, you were too much occupied with other things to notice, or if you noticed them, you have forgotten them. Oh, if we only profited by all the messengers Jesus sends us, how different our lives would be!

3rd Point. - The voice cries in the desert. Earth is a desert to Jesus, because His Father is not loved and honoured there; and yet we try to make a home of the desert, and marvel then we cannot make ourselves comfortable in it. The voice cries in the desert. Jesus is often obliged to make a desert for us, because we will not listen to His voice, or the voice of His messengers, in the crowded city. When sweet Jesus wants a soul all to Himself, and purposes to do great things in her, He leads her into the very depths of the wilderness. He takes from her all she loves; He makes earth utterly desolate; and He leaves her for a little while to know and feel the bitterness and anguish of this desolation; and then, O then, He comes to her Himself into the wilderness, and the desert rejoices and blossoms like the rose, and the rivers of waters break forth, and the soul, suspended between heaven and earth, lies upon the cross with Jesus, and lives only to love or to suffer, and suffering manifest is here only joy, and love is her reward.

Aspiration. - Sweet Infant Jesus, make me faithful to the calls of Thy messengers.

Form your resolution, and place it in the Heart of the Infant Jesus. Examen of Meditation.

Return to the Ninth Meditation. . . *Proceed to the Eleventh Meditation*

Saints' Prayers

selected from the annals of history unto our current day

Meditations

Meditations for Advent and Easter

by the author of "Meditations for Lent," "St. Francis and the Franciscans," "The Life and Revelations of S. Gertrude," Etc. Etc.

Meditation XI - *Wednesday*

The Heart of the Infant Jesus, the Lamb of God

"Send forth, O Lord, the Lamb, the ruler of the earth. . . . And a throne shall be prepared in mercy, and one shall sit upon it in truth in the tabernacle of David, judging and seeking judgment, and quickly rendering that which is just." (Is. xvi. 1, 5.) Lesson at Matins.

1st Prelude. - Represent to yourself the Infant Lamb of God in Mary's womb, the tabernacle of David.

2nd Prelude. - Adore Him in that tabernacle, and pray that He may rule you from it.

1st Point. - Jesus is coming to us now as the Lamb. We know how gentle, how humble, how silent, how uncomplaining is that Lamb. Lambs were used for sacrifice, and Jesus is coming to be a sacrifice. One day we shall see Him as the "Lamb that was slain," and that Lamb has a "book of life," in which He writes the names of His children. (Apocalypse, xiii. 8.) Oh, let us go to Him now, and implore Him to write our names in that blessed book! Alas! that they must be written with His Blood. One day we shall see that Lamb "standing upon Mount Sion" (Apoc. xiv. 1), and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand having His name, and the name of His Father written on their foreheads. And those blessed souls who stand near this gentle Lamb, who stand nearest to Him, who go wherever He goes, those souls who sing a canticle which no one else can learn, who are they? And why are they thus so wonderfully favoured? We know this also; they are "virgins," and the first-fruits of that most precious blood which the Lamb is coming to pour forth, that He may purchase them. Oh, how dear are virgins to Jesus, when He purchases them first of all the redeemed!

2nd Point. - But the Lamb has a throne. We are told what the throne is, and how it was prepared. The throne was "prepared in mercy." Let us look for this coming Lamb, and we shall soon see where He is enthroned.

He sits in the tabernacle of David. Mary is the tabernacle of David, where the Lamb is enthroned, a thousand times more beautiful and more magnificent than the Temple of Solomon, the poor type of her perfect holiness and incomparable beauty. And if it was so honoured, and the Holy of Holies so revered, because it contained the ark and the cloud of the chekhinah, how shall she be honoured and revered who contained the Lamb of God! His throne is "prepared in mercy." Who can ever fathom the depth of mercy which prepared Mary to be the throne of mercy, the well-spring from which the fount of mercy poured itself forth upon the whole earth.

3rd Point. - Jesus is coming now as the Lamb. He is coming to open the "sealed book" (Apoc. v. 5) of the Incarnation, which none other could open. The seals of redemption are opened. But when the Lamb comes as the "Lion of the tribe of Juda," He will open the seals of judgment, and pour forth the vials of wrath. Oh, let us beseech Him to come now as the Lamb, the Ruler of the earth! Let us submit ourselves to His gentle reign, lest haply we should be compelled to submit to Him as the Lion of wrath and judgment. Now He comes as the Lamb, to give us the fleece of His justice to cover us, the fleece of His merits to sanctify us. He comes to give us His blood to purify us, and His flesh to feed us. Oh, how can we ever love this gentle Lamb enough! And if we receive Him with love, when He comes hereafter as the Lion to a guilty world, He will come as the Lamb to us. If we submit to the rule of the Lamb now, the Lamb will rule us for all eternity, for those "who have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb," shall serve Him day and night; they shall hunger no more, and thirst no more, and the "Lamb shall rule them, and lead them to the fountains of the waters of life." (Apoc. vii. 17.)

Aspiration. - O come, Thou blessed gentle Lamb - come quickly.

Form your resolution, and place it in the Heart of the Infant Jesus.
Examen of Meditation.

Return to the Tenth Meditation. . . Further Meditations Available in the Book

Saints' Prayers

selected from the annals of history unto our current day

Meditations for the Holy Season of Lent

by a Member of the Society of Jesus

Meditation I - *Especially for Ash-Wednesday*

On Exterior Penance and Mortification

1st Point. There is nothing more united and less united than the soul and body. When one advances, the other recoils; when one rises, the other descends; when one is in health, the other is sick; when one is strong, the other is weak. It is necessary, then, in order to strengthen and give health to the soul, to bring the body under subjection, and weaken its evil propensities by penance and mortification.

I am not a man if I obey my passions; I am not a Christian if I do not combat with and overcome my passions; I am not a true penitent if I do not mortify my passions. Since my body is polluted by sin, it ought to be purified by pain; and since it has part in the pleasures of the soul, it ought to glory in sharing its sorrows.

2nd Point. How do I know that my sins are forgiven? How do I know that the pain which my offences merit is remitted? How do I know that God will not punish me in my body? How do I know that he will not chastise me in my soul? How do I know that he will not regard me with coldness, and permit me to fall into some grievous sin? How do I know that I shall be able to rise after falling therein?

3rd Point. If I spare myself, God will not spare me; if I love myself, God will not love me; if I hate myself, God will not hate me; if I punish myself, God will not punish me; if I excuse nothing in myself, God will pardon all; if I excuse all things in myself, God will pardon nothing; if I am indulgent to myself, God will be severe; if I am austere and harsh with myself, God will be merciful.

Oh, Christian soul! make your body a living and dying victim; mortify your passions, your senses, and your desires; mortify yourself at all times, and in all places; mortify yourself with zeal, mortify yourself with discretion.

Proceed to the Second Meditation

Saints' Prayers

selected from the annals of history unto our current day

Meditations

Meditations for the Holy Season of Lent

by a Member of the Society of Jesus

Meditation II - *Thursday*

On Exterior Penance and Mortification II

1st Point. Make a free offering of your body to God, and he will impart to you his Spirit. Be watchful and careful in the discipline of your exterior, and he will guard and provide for the interior. Do all that you can, and that which you cannot accomplish he will do for you. Walk while you can, and when your strength fails you he will bear you in his arms. Fast with Jesus, that you may eat the Pasch with him.

2nd Point. Fasting is salutary for both soul and body; it is an efficacious remedy for their diseases. Nothing is impossible to him who has faith; nothing is difficult to him who loves; all is possible to him who reposes his trust in God. Fast if you can, and persuade yourself that you can do more than you imagine yourself capable of. Fasting is blessed by God, consecrated by his Son, and observed by all the faithful. God imparts strength to those who fast, and deprives of strength those who do not.

Good cheer and luxurious ease are destructive to the health and life of all men; fasting and abstinence are safe remedies which restore the health and prolong the lives of all who practise them. He who shall have lost his health and strength for Jesus Christ, shall recover all that he thinks he has lost. He who desires to preserve his body and health, to the prejudice of the interests of Jesus Christ, shall lose all that he hopes to gain.

3rd Point. I will therefore chastise my body as the Apostles did, for fear of being found among the reprobates. I desire, with all my heart, to follow the example and imitate the life of Jesus Christ, that I may be of the number of the predestined. I will mortify my body, in order to remedy the maladies of my soul; I will deprive it of the power of revolting, by fasting, which will impair its strength. I will mortify my senses, that I may live a spiritual life. I wish to die with Jesus, that I may rise with Jesus. I wish for stripes and wounds, that I may become a true member of his thorn crowned head; and if I have not courage to inflict them on myself, I will at least suffer with thankfulness whatever afflictions God may see fit, in his divine providence, to send me.

WORDS OF SCRIPTURE

"The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary to one to another." - Galatians, v.

"And they that are Christ's have crucified their flesh, with its vices and concupiscences." - Ibid.

"If you live according to the flesh, you shall die." - Romans, viii.

"For the wisdom of the flesh is death; but the wisdom of the spirit is life and peace." - Ibid.

"Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord." - Jeremias, xvii.

Return to the First Meditation . . . *Proceed to the Third Meditation*

Saints' Prayers

selected from the annals of history unto our current day

Meditations for the Holy Season of Lent

by a Member of the Society of Jesus

Meditation III - *Friday*

On the Excellence of Mortification

1st Point. What is mortification? It is a death of love which destroys the criminal life, detaches the mind from the senses, separates the soul from the body, and makes it live in the spirit.

It is a sacrifice of love, in which the Holy Ghost is the priest, the body is the victim, the heart is the altar, pain the knife, love the fire, glory the fruit.

2nd Point. What is mortification? It is a martyrdom of love, less bloody than a martyrdom of faith, but longer and more wearisome, more free, and (in one sense) more voluntary.

What is mortification? It is a continuation of the sacrifice of the passion of Jesus, which supplies all that is wanting in his sufferings; which transforms our bodies into members of his, and animates them with his divine spirit; which makes us participate in his sorrows, merit his graces, and finally exalts us to the throne of his glory.

3rd Point. Why is it that I mortify myself so little? Alas! it is because I do not love Jesus Christ, and am not one of his members animated by his spirit; it is because I lead a sensual and carnal life, and despise and shrink from his sufferings; it is that I am the slave of my body, and seek only the pleasures of the flesh, and relish not those of the spirit, being worldly, sensual, voluptuous, and the enemy of God. Oh! in order that I may die the death of the just, I will henceforth live the life of the just; I will, from this moment, become a victim of love, that I may die in the arms of divine love.

WORDS OF SCRIPTURE

"I beseech you, brethren, by the mercy of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing unto God." - Romans, xii.

"I die daily." - 1 Corinthians, xv.

"With Christ I am nailed to the cross." - Galatians, ii.

"Who now rejoice in my sufferings, and fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ, in my flesh for his body, which is the Church." - Colossians, i.

"Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? The grace of God, by Jesus Christ our Lord." - Romans, vii.

Return to the Second Meditation . . . *Proceed to the Fourth Meditation*

Saints' Prayers

selected from the annals of history unto our current day

Meditations

Meditations for the Holy Season of Lent

by a Member of the Society of Jesus

Meditation IV - *Saturday*

On the Obligations We Are Under to Meditate on the Passion of Jesus Christ

1st Point. The Son of God is well pleased when we reflect on the sorrows of his bitter passion; and we owe him this consolation, since it was for us that he suffered and yielded himself a willing victim to the justice of God, bearing in himself the punishment due for our sins. It was for this that he descended from the throne of his splendour at the right hand of the Father, and passed his life on earth in poverty, humiliation, and misery, *"Blotting out,"* says St. Paul, *"the handwriting of the decree that was against us, fastening it to his cross."* We should, then, suffer with patience and joy, for the love of him, all pain, all distress, all injuries, which may overtake us. But he only asks us to come hither, and, at the foot of the cross, think of the love we owe him, and the excessive griefs he has suffered for our salvation. Is there anything more just? Notwithstanding which, we occupy ourselves but little with such reflections. When they are presented to our minds, do we not think of them with lightness and frivolity, and without interest, attention, or grief! The grandeurs, the vanities, and pleasures of the world, engross our thoughts, while the sorrows and pangs of Jesus are forgotten! Can anything be more unjust?

2nd Point. There is nothing sweeter or more consoling, than to meditate on the passion of Jesus, because it reveals to us the excess of his tender and compassionate love, and inspires us with a lively and strong hope, that God will pardon our sins, and be merciful to our infirmities. For the Son of God has satisfied the justice of God the Father; he has transferred to us the treasures of his merits; and we should glory more in the price he has given for us, than in all the blessings, graces, and joys, which we hope to obtain from his infinite goodness.

These are sweet reflections, and ought to fill our souls with consolation. What joy and pleasure ought we not to derive from the fountain of all grace, which is ever open and free for the refreshment of souls!

I have committed many and grievous sins; my conscience is terrified; but why should I be cast down or troubled, when I remember the wounds of my Saviour, and that it was for my sins that he received them? "There are no wounds, however mortal," says St. Bernard, "which may not be healed by the death of Jesus."

3rd Point. The remembrance of the passion of our Lord, is very useful to us in our spiritual warfare; for it renders us victorious over our enemies, who are the world, the flesh, and the devil. The devil tempts us by despair or presumption: despair arises from ignorance of the mercy of God, who delivered his only Son to death for the salvation of sinners, and

accepted his sufferings in payment of their debt. He revealed his justice in the rigorous treatment which he inflicted on his only, his most holy and innocent Son, who, wearing only the likeness of a sinner, and being clothed in the shadow of our transgressions, was obliged to submit to the weight of his anger, and suffer the penalty of our guilt.

The passion of Jesus enables us to obtain the victory over the world, which tempts us only by love and pleasure, fear and grief; for who is there that can love pleasure, when they behold the Saviour of the world consumed by suffering? Who can fear grief and pain, when they reflect that Jesus preferred them to all the splendour and felicity of paradise?

The flesh is our most dangerous enemy; it is that which tempts us both by love and fear; but the passion of Jesus inspires us with horror for all that it loves, and with love for all that it hates and fears. When I see the body of my Saviour covered with wounds, I am constrained to cry out, with one of the saints, in accents of tender compunction, *Behold mine, without wounds!*

Oh, Saviour of my soul! is it surprising that I, who meditate so seldom on thy sacred passion, who shrink with horror from the contemplation of thy wondrous sufferings, who turn my eyes away from thy wounds, should yield to temptations when they assail me? But, from henceforth, I will establish my habitation on Calvary. There do I wish to live - there do I wish to die. Not on Thabor will I begin my Lent, but on this hill of grief. Here I will say, "It is good, O Lord, for me to be in this place." Oh, spectacle full of profit and consolation, to behold a God expiring on a cross for the love of sinners!

WORDS OF SCRIPTURE

"Think diligently upon him that endureth such opposition from sinners against himself, that you be not wearied, fainting in your minds." - Hebrews, xii.

"O all ye that pass by the way, attend, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow." - Lamentations, i.

"For I judged not myself to know anything among you, but Jesus Christ and him crucified." - 1 Corinthians, ii.

"Forget not the kindness of thy surety, for he hath given his life for thee." - Eccles. xxix.

"Christ, therefore, having suffered in the flesh, be you also armed with the same thought." - 1 Peter, iv.

Return to the Third Meditation . . . *Proceed to the Fifth Meditation*

Saints' Prayers

selected from the annals of history unto our current day

Meditations

Meditations for the Holy Season of Lent

by a Member of the Society of Jesus

Meditation V - *Sunday*

On the Causes of Temptation

The Gospel

Matt. iv. 1-11.

"At that time, Jesus was led by the spirit into the desert, to be tempted by the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterwards hungry. And the tempter coming, said to him: If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. Who answered and said: It is written: Not in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Then the devil took him into the holy city, and set him upon a pinnacle of the temple, and said to him: If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down; for it is written: He hath given his angels charge over thee; and in their hands shall they bear thee up, lest perhaps thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said to him: It is written again: Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Again the

devil took him up into a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, and said to him: All these will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and adore me. Then Jesus said to him: Begone, Satan; for it is written: The Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil left him; and, behold, angels came and ministered to him."

ON THE CAUSES

1st Point. Why did our Lord suffer himself to be tempted? It was in order to vanquish our enemy, to teach us how to combat, to inspire us with courage, to animate us by his example, to humiliate the devil, who triumphed over Adam, to repair the sin of our first parents, and to raise them from their fallen condition, by giving their children power to triumph over the devil.

2nd Point. Why am I tempted? It is because you are proud, because you do not guard your senses, especially your eyes and ears, because you are under the dominion of bad habits, which hold correspondence with the devil; it is, perhaps, because you are not in the order, or state, in which God desires you to be, and have not followed your vocation; it is that your heart is attached to creatures, or that you are not sufficiently occupied; it is that you are a man, a sinful man and a Christian, and that you desire only happiness and consolation. For a man, being free, is not always determined to do good; but the sinner, being a slave, is under the dominion of him who has conquered. The Christian, being a soldier, should never relax his warfare, or slumber at his post. If the righteous wish to be crowned, they must first be proved by temptation.

3rd Point. Why has the devil tempted me? Because he hates the image of God, which you bear in you; because he is envious of man, and wishes him to be in his own place; because he seeks to make you his slave and the companion of his pains. It is for this end that he desires to enter into your heart, which is the throne of God, to be adored therein; strives to profane his temple and sanctuary; wishes to drive Jesus Christ from his kingdom, which is in you; wishes to crucify him anew, in your soul, and renew the ignominies of his passion. Do you not assist him in his malicious designs? Do you not satisfy his ambitious schemes? You do this as often as you yield assent to his temptations.

4th Point. Why does God suffer me to be tempted? For his glory and your good. He wishes to know if you truly love him; he wishes you to know yourself, and to make you sensible of your infirmities, and constrain you

to have recourse to him; he wishes to prove your virtue, to hold you in dependence on him, to prepare you for combat, detach you from creatures, and render you worthy of eternal life.

Oh, Jesus, Saviour of my soul! since thou hast been tempted, I am no longer astonished that I also suffer temptations. It is good for me to know thee and know myself. Temptation is necessary and salutary for me, because it renders me humble, and prevents me from being presumptuous. Let me be tempted, then, my God, and prove me to see if there is any iniquity in me. Oh, no, my God, do not tempt me; I know my miseries too well! Deliver me speedily from temptation, at least strengthen me against its assaults, and give me courage to vanquish it. Satan aims at thee as well as at thy servant. Defend thyself and thy interests, therefore, in me, against thy enemy and mine.

WORDS OF SCRIPTURE

"God tempted Abraham." - Genesis, xxii.

"Fear not; for God is come to prove you." - Exodus, xx.

"Ananias, why hath Satan tempted thy heart?" - Acts, v.

"God hath tried them, and found them worthy of himself." - Wisdom, iii.

"As gold in the furnace he hath proved them." - Ibid.

Return to the Fourth Meditation . . . *Proceed to the Sixth Meditation*

Saints' Prayers

selected from the annals of history unto our current day

Meditations

Meditations for the Holy Season of Lent

by a Member of the Society of Jesus

Meditation VI - *Monday*

On the the Passion of Our Lord in General

1st Point. Jesus is the true Son of God. He is the holiest of men, the greatest of kings, the faithfulest of friends. He never injures any, but does good to all. And all the world have conspired against him, all the world have persecuted him. As he suffered for all men, so all men have made him suffer. Men and women of all ranks have contributed to his passion. Jews, Gentiles, priests, kings, soldiers, and people, men and women, and his own disciples even, have all put a hand to his cross, and added to his miseries. Are you not of the number? are you not the most cruel of his persecutors?

2nd Point. Jesus suffered every description of evil in his soul and body, mind and heart, memory and imagination, his honour and goods, his parents and friends; in his senses and in all his limbs! He was a man of sorrows, and I wish to be devoted to sensual pleasures! He suffered from all the world, and I wish to suffer from none! He suffered all imaginable evils, and I wish to suffer none! He suffered the worst of evils, and I wish for those only which are light! He suffered voluntarily, I suffer only what I cannot avoid!

3rd Point. Oh, my sweet Jesus! thy holy passion fills me with grief and confusion. It is a great source of grief to me to behold thee suffering for me! It is a source of great confusion to me not to be able to suffer for thee! Give me grace, at least, to suffer ordinary evils with patience, and, by thy divine aid, render me capable of supporting, from day to day, those more weighty and grievous afflictions which may visit me, and through which, as a fiery ordeal, I must pass.

Return to the Fifth Meditation . . . *Proceed to the Seventh Meditation*

Meditations for the Holy Season of Lent

by a Member of the Society of Jesus

Meditation VII - *Tuesday*

On the the Passion of Our Lord in General II

1st Point. Jesus is the victim of all time and of all men; the victim of sinners and of the just. As he has loaded himself with all our crimes, he has crowned himself with all our sufferings! As there are none of his creatures whom he has not loved, there are none for whom he has not suffered. But he suffered principally for myself, as he bestows more graces on me than on others, which are the fruits of his sufferings. He has ever held me in remembrance, and I never think of him! I do not love him, or desire to suffer for his sake.

2nd Point. Why did Jesus die? Why did he desire the unspeakable anguish and misery that he endured? Alas! he died to return to me the life which I lost through sin; he rendered himself miserable to secure for me an eternal felicity; he delivered himself to the power of his enemies to deliver me from mine! He did not question the judgment of Pilate, he did not work miracles as he might have done, to deliver himself from their hands. He was crucified throughout his life. His heart was transfixed to the cross with his body. The greatest of all his sufferings was in not suffering; it was his chief desire to be baptized in his own blood, to drain the chalice of his passion, and die.

Oh, sweetest Jesus! thou wert not displeased with thy enemies for doing that which thou didst so much desire, and which enabled thee to suffer without measure. It was only their sins and malice which diminished thy satisfaction, and added to thy griefs. The torments which they inflicted on thee cannot be surpassed in cruelty, nor could they make thee suffer more. They loaded thee with opprobriums and ignominy, and treated

thee as the most miserable of all slaves, and the most abandoned of all men. Couldst thou have suffered more than thou didst suffer, or die in more cruel agonies than thou didst?

3rd Point. And I avoid all suffering and mortification, and would even escape death. I wish to live surrounded by delights and enjoyments, when, if justice were awarded me, I should at this moment be suffering all the pains of hell. Where is it that I do not find examples of thy goodness and tender mercy? Where is it that I do not discover my own malice and presumption? Where is it that my ingratitude is not apparent?

WORDS OF SCRIPTURE

"For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead corporally." - Colossians, ii.

"And Christ died for all." - 2 Corinthians, v.

"Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us." - Galatians, i.

"And I have a baptism, wherewith I am to be baptized: and how I am straitened until it is accomplished?" - St. Luke, xii.

"From the sole of his foot to the top of his head, there is no soundness therein: wounds and bruises and swelling sores: they are not bound up, nor dressed, nor fomented with oil." - Isaias, i.

Return to the Sixth Meditation . . . *Proceed to the Eighth Meditation*

Saints' Prayers

selected from the annals of history unto our current day

Meditations

Meditations for the Holy Season of Lent

by a Member of the Society of Jesus

Meditation VIII - *Wednesday*

Jesus in the Garden of Olives

1st Point. Jesus is sorrowful even unto death. What is the cause of his sadness? Is it the foreknowledge of all that he is to suffer? Alas, no! it is the sight of my sins, my ingratitude, my misery? I laugh at those things which should cause me to weep! I take pleasure in that which ought to render me miserable! He has compassion on me, and I have none on him.

2nd Point. He is seized with fear to prove that he is man, that he is human and infirm like myself. He has divested himself of his strength, and clothed himself with my weakness; he has given me his courage, and taken my timidity; he trembles to assure me, fears to encourage me, falls to raise me! Oh, what goodness! what charity! Where can we find a physician who is willing to give his health and strength to his patients in exchange for their maladies and feebleness? *Oh! surely, he hath borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows.*

3rd Point. Pleasure and grief constitute the causes of the sins of men; desire and fear their passions. Jesus has vanquished these two enemies, and imparted to us his strength, that we also may vanquish them. He has abstained from all pleasure, suffered all griefs, renounced all the desires of nature, triumphed over all fears, sweat blood and water from all his veins, and contended even unto death.

Return to the Seventh Meditation . . . *Proceed to the Ninth Meditation*

Saints' Prayers

selected from the annals of history unto our current day

Meditations

Meditations for the Holy Season of Lent

by a Member of the Society of Jesus

Meditation IX - *Thursday*

On the Bloody Sweat

1st Point. Consider, my soul, how rude was this first shock of his sacred passion to our divine Saviour! Behold him kneeling, bathed in his own blood, which oozes from every pore. It is the fear of his approaching torments; it is the horror inspired by your crimes, and the desire for your salvation, which excites this intolerable combat in his sacred heart. He has concentrated in himself all the iniquities of the human race, and conceived for them so great a sorrow, that he must have expired had not his life been preserved by a miracle. He wrought miracles that he might suffer, but none to exempt himself from suffering. And I am impatient, because God does not constantly interpose miracles to exempt me from suffering and dying.

2nd Point. Oh, Saviour of my soul! this first combat of thine has been a bloody and fearful one! What pains it cost thee to dissipate, by the violence of thy sorrow, the multitude of our crimes, which thou hadst before thine eyes! I was with Judas in the Garden of Gethsemani to seize thee! I was in thy sacred heart to afflict thee! My sins were in the world before my birth; they strengthened the arms of the Jews to strike and buffet thee; and delivered thee to thy enemies, who tormented thee with malicious ingenuity, and afterwards crucified thee!

3rd Point. Oh, divine Master! thou hast given to the world most noble and beautiful examples, but no one desires to imitate them; thou hast taught us the most perfect lessons, but no one desires to learn them; thou goest first to the conflict, but none follow thee. Thy disciples have basely abandoned thee; they sleep while thou dost watch; they enjoy repose while thou art engaged in a bitter warfare; they afflict instead of consoling thee; they betray instead of delivering thee!

Oh, what confusion overwhelms me! Jesus overcomes all the alarms and infirmities of nature, clothed as he was with the weakness of man, and I yield to them, although I am sustained by the strength of God; he goes

generously to the conflict with my timidity, and I, who am endowed with his courage, fly!

Oh, precious blood, which watered and bathed this ungrateful earth, warm my cold heart, water my arid soul, strengthen my spirit, and raise up my fallen courage! I wish to enter the combat with a firm resolution to overcome and resist the rebellious movements of nature, even unto the shedding of blood. I will, by the grace and in the strength of God, triumph over my flesh, and subject my spirit to divine charity. I will maintain the warfare, until, like thee, I sweat blood and water. Like thee will I suffer, and drink the chalice of thy bitterness unto death.

WORDS OF SCRIPTURE

"The chalice which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" - St. John, xviii.

"He began to grow sorrowful and to be sad. Then he saith to them: My soul is sorrowful even unto death: stay you here, and watch with me." - St. Matt. xxvi.

"And his sweat became as drops of blood, trickling down upon the ground." - St. Luke, xxii.

"Surely he hath borne our infirmities, and carried our sorrows." - Isaias, liii.

Return to the Eighth Meditation . . . *Proceed to the Tenth Meditation*

Saints' Prayers

selected from the annals of history unto our current day

Meditations

Meditations for the Holy Season of Lent

by a Member of the Society of Jesus

Meditation X - *Friday*

The Prayer of Jesus in the Garden

1st Point. Jesus, in his sadness, withdraws himself from his disciples, for the purpose of praying to God his Father to remove from his lips the bitter cup of his passion. He prays with reverence, prostrating himself before him. He prays with perseverance for several hours. He prays with resignation to the divine will of God his Father. He prays, and is not favourably heard, that we may learn to pray and be resigned.

2nd Point. Oh, sweet and tender Jesus! thou didst not desire to receive a consoling answer to thy prayers, that we might prevail in ours. Thou didst not obtain favour for thyself, but secured it for me. I am heard favourably when I pray, but he was not. He could have commanded legions of angels to come to his assistance, but he did not invoke their presence, because he wished to die and shed his blood for our salvation. What charity! what compassion! what mercy!

3rd Point. Pray in your afflictions. Pray that God may remove them from you; pray with humility; pray with constancy and perseverance; pray with resignation; pray with conformity to the will of God. Weary not in prayer, and murmur not if you are not heard.

Propose to yourself all those subjects of fear and sadness which distress you, and present them to Jesus, saying: My Lord and my Saviour, behold this chalice of confusion which thou hast presented to me to drink; remove it far from my lips, for it is extremely bitter; nevertheless, not my will but thine be done. Father of mercies! behold a chalice of grief prepared for me ! Father of the poor! behold a chalice of poverty, presented to me by thy divine providence! Must I drain it? Wilt thou not in pity remove it? I pray thee, O my God, to dispense me from this bitter draught; yet not my will but thine be done.

WORDS OF SCRIPTURE

*"And going a little further, he fell on his face, praying, and saying: My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou **wilt**." - St. Matt. xxvi.*

"My Father, if this chalice may not pass away, but I must drink it, thy will be done." - Ibid.

"Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee: take away this chalice from me: but not what I will, but what thou wilt." - St. Mark, xiv.

"O my God, I shall cry by day, and thou wilt not hear; and by night, and it shall not be reputed as folly in me." - Psalm xxi.

Return to the Ninth Meditation . . . *Proceed to the Eleventh Meditation*

Saints' Prayers

selected from the annals of history unto our current day

Meditations

Meditations by Rev. John Wyse

from the book 'Devout Exercises: Compromising Meditations and Visits to the Sanctuaries of the Blessed Virgin for Every Day in the Month of May'

Meditation I - Introduction, History & Preparation

On the Devotion of the Month of Mary

Every Catholic knows something about the devotion peculiar to the month of May. Hence it seems almost needless to observe, that its chief purport is to offer a public homage to Mary, the Mother of God, in common with the whole Catholic Church, by affectionately consecrating to her honour the most beautiful month of all the twelve. Through the experience of former years, we are most of us pretty well acquainted with this pious custom. It may not be amiss, however, to recal to mind at the outset, something of its history and object. The month of May has not

always been consecrated to Our Lady. The devotion is of comparatively recent date in the Church: hardly earlier than the end of the last century. Let us learn, then, how it first began, and how it comes to be in such universal use at the present day.

The Church has always been the same in Faith. She never changes, nor can she change, as Our Lord has built her upon the Rock of Ages.

Consequently, the great love and devotion to the Blessed Virgin, now so prevalent, is nothing new. Catholics have ever loved Mary, and from the time of the Apostles till now there never existed a Catholic Church where her intercessory power was not fully acknowledged, and where she was not venerated and prayed to just as in these days.

It does not follow from this, however, that the outward forms of prayer and homage have never changed. We pray to Mary with the same faith as our forefathers, but not always with the same forms. We accommodate ourselves, as far as possible, to the customs and spiritual wants of the age we live in; and in doing so, we but carry out the intentions of Holy Church, which, like an indulgent and watchful mother, is ready to bend herself to each one's requirements and habits. The faith of the Church is unalterable. Not so her discipline, which, as necessity or prudence may indicate, she modifies and suits to the times. Now, in the former ages of the Church, when the piety of the masses was more fervent and more fruitful in good works than now, pilgrimages to the Sanctuaries of Our Lady was one way in which true devotion showed itself. As the tidings used to reach any particular country, that some holy place had been favoured by a visit from the mother of God, or sanctified by prodigies, let it have been ever so distant, crowds of devout pilgrims would set out to gain the new sanctuary; and as they returned home happy and blessed, the neighbours would begin to follow their example, and thus, for many centuries, a continuous round of pious pilgrimages was kept up. The faith of our ancestors was displayed again, in the erection of innumerable churches and oratories dedicated to Mary; so that, taking England as an example, there was not a single church in that now faithless country, which in Catholic days, had not its Lady-chapel attached. Another beautiful practice of the olden times, and which still prevails amongst Catholic nations, was the placing of wayside crosses and stations on all the high and bye-roads, in which representations the prominent position due to Our Blessed Lady was never forgotten.

Oh, how happy the country where such customs obtain! But, in process of time, this piety waned: and now, although there yet exist many places of

sacred resort to Mary - although, where the true Faith has remained, there also remain the devout practices ofCatholic days - still from external pressure and other circumstances, the ancient forms of devotion are not so generally followed as of old. The Church, however, is ever the same good mother; and with loving solicitude she has provided even for our weakness and want of fervour. In very compassion she now brings to our doors,what formerly it might have required long journeys to procure. The Blessed Mother of God must be venerated and prayed to at any cost. Hence the multiplication, by Church authority, of the festivals of Our Lady: hence the institution of numberless confraternities in her honour: hence the investiture of the Scapulars of Mary: hence the many public devotions, the indulgenced prayers, the rosaries, and the medals we wear - and lastly, the most beautiful idea of consecrating the Month of May, as a special act of homage, to Our Blessed Lady.

This touching devotion, like so many others, originated in Catholic Italy. It was a holy missionary, named Father Lalomia, who appears first to have thought that, in the same way as the servants of Mary are accustomed to honour her on one day particularly in the week, and to pray to her thrice a day besides, so would it be right and congruous to consecrate one month in the year to the especial honour of Our Blessed Lady. And what month could have been chosen more appropriate, or more like to Mary herself, than that in which all nature is fresh, and when the green foliage and the smiling flowers, seem so charmingly to invite us to love God, and His Blessed Mother? The Holy Father Pope Pius VII soon approved of the pious design: and in order to give signal encouragement to so sweet a devotion, an apostolical brief of the 21st of March 1815, accorded an indulgence of 300 days for each day in the month to all the faithful who, during the Month of May, should honour the Most Holy Virgin by devotions, prayers, and other acts of virtue, and a plenary indulgence on one day in the same month, when, having duly confessed and communicated, they should pray for the necessities of the Church, and the intentions of His Holiness. Both indulgences can be applied, by way of suffrage, to the souls in purgatory. Sanctioned by such authority, the Month of Mary could not fail to spread and to prosper.

And there are now few places in the Catholic world, where this holy observance is not regularly carried out. Many blessings are sure to follow in the train of Our Lady: and wherever the Month of May is so consecrated, there sinning souls are converted to grace, piety blooms forth anew, and the faith is sensibly revived. So true is it, that no one ever invoked in vain the intercession of the Mother of God.

The devotion of the Month of Mary is variously performed, according to the opportunities at hand or the places we are in. The most common way is to decorate an altar of the Blessed Virgin as profusely as possible with flowers and candles, and to meet there at a certain time in the day, or in the evening to recite the Litany, to read some pious meditation, or to listen to a discourse, and to say some prayers directly to Our Blessed Lady. But the best way to honour Mary, is to imitate her virtues. Thus, if any one were to think of dedicating this month to the Blessed Virgin, without at the same time endeavouring to curb his pas. sions, to mend his life, and to turn to God, he would fall-into a grievous mistake. There can be no homage so acceptable to Mary, as a change of heart and the renewal of fervour in the service of Almighty God.

It remains for us to see what our plan embraces, in the form of devotions for this month. We shall make daily a meditation upon some of the most important truths concerning our salvation, at the conclusion of which, we shall always put ourselves for that day under the good patronage of Mary. We shall then pay a spiritual visit to some one of the famous Sanctuaries of Our Lady, throughout Christendom; and towards the end of our devotions we shall recite a prayer to the Blessed Virgin, taken from one of the canonized saints of Holy Church, or from other devout writers.

And now, as a good and fervent beginning to Mary's month, let us all make resolutions to spend it well, and in a manner pleasing to her. Let us not be content with avoiding mortal sin, but endeavour to keep clear of venial sin also. We may make this our special intention, during the month: and if as yet our minds do not easily yield to so holy a thought, with strict attention on our part to the daily meditations we are now to begin, Our Blessed Lady will procure such sentiments for us.

But besides, let us endeavour during this month to induce some one who is out of the Church either through heresy or vice, to see his error, and to seek reconciliation with God where alone it can be found.

Again, our appetite should be mortified somewhat more than ordinarily: for fasting or abstaining in honour of Mary, is a practice time honoured and good. Let us be especially careful, whilst making the Month of Mary, not to speak evil of others, or to judge any one rashly, or to provoke our neighbour to anger: and lastly, let us try to say the Rosary, to give alms to the poor, to visit daily the Blessed Sacrament, and thus every day to consecrate anew the sweet Month of May to Mary.

Oh, how sound a thing it is to be devout to the Blessed Virgin! If we examine such as possess that devotion, we may find them wayward, impatient, or with many venial failings; but in the main they are always good Christians. In the first place, Mary is the guardian of the Faith. We are, therefore sure of our faith, if we pay her true homage and devotion. But besides, she is the most powerful intercessor in pleading for us with Christ. Her Divine Son never refuses her anything; and, if it be right to make a distinction, one could almost say that the worse the state of a man's soul the more pity has Mary. She is the "Consoler of the Afflicted," the " Help of Christians," and by these and other comforting names we love to invoke her; but, by what title more tender or inspiring can we call her, we who are exiles in this vale of tears, sojourners in this world of sin, than "Mary, Refuge of Sinners?" "Oh, pray then for us, glorious Virgin, Refuge of Sinners, that worthily, perseveringly, and with true piety we may so practice this touching devotion, as to find here a new light for our spirits, and thus to save our souls."

VISIT TO A SANCTUARY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN

Of all the Sanctuaries of Our Lady, that of Bethlehem is surely the greatest - the first in order, the first in dignity.

No Christian need be told the history of that holy place. Our Lord was born there, and there Our Lady tended and nursed Him. There Mary first began her sacred office in the Church, by presenting her divine Son to be adored, first by the poor, then by the rich. And did not those holy men, those first fruits of Christ's coming, did they not each, as they entered the sacred stable of Bethlehem, question His Mother, and ask if the Infant in the manger was not the Christ? and as she would assure them that so it was, can we not see them falling down to adore Him?

Consequently the worship of the true God, and His true worship, comes to us through Mary, O beautiful thought for a Christian soul! and thus has it been ever since the scenes of Bethlehem till now. Mary is always leading men into the Church procuring graces for them to make the step, and when they are there, helping them, consoling them, and above all, pointing out to them where the only true happiness and peace may be found, in the possession namely of Christ her Son, and in the participation of His Sacraments.

Thus the events of Bethlehem are enacted over again for us. The holy precincts of the stable of Bethlehem have always been a Sanctuary of Mary, and excepting the interruption caused necessarily by the wars in

Palestine, it has never been wanting in devout worshippers and pilgrims. If at Bethlehem there were no devotion to Mary, where would there be? For several centuries, and under some restrictions, the sacred shrine has been confided to the care of the Friars of the Order of St. Francis, who do all in their power to maintain the devotion which the feelings of the place generate to Mary; Let us make our pilgrimage thither in spirit: and be we rich or poor, whether we adore the divine Infant in the arms of His Mother, with the poor shepherds, or with the kings of the East, let the blessed Sanctuary of Bethlehem, inspire us henceforth to promote with ardour, the homage and love, which Mary so justly claims from Christians.

PRAYER OF ST. PETER DAMIAN

O Holy Virgin, Mother of God! succour those who implore thine aid. Turn likewise affectionately towards us. I know, O my Sovereign Lady! that thou art all goodness, and that thou dost love us with a love that cannot be surpassed by any other love. How often dost thou not appease the anger of our Judge, when He is on the point of chastising us! All the treasures of the divine mercy are in thy hands. Turn then towards us, that we may be enabled to go and behold thee in heaven: for the greatest glory we possess, after seeing God, will be to see thee, to love thee, and to dwell beside thy throne. Be thou then pleased to listen to our prayer: for it is the will of thy beloved Son, to honour thee by denying thee nothing that thou askcst. Amen.

Proceed to the Second Meditation

Saints' Prayers

selected from the annals of history unto our current day

Meditations

Meditations by Rev. John Wyse

from the book 'Devout Exercises: Compromising Meditations and Visits to the Sanctuaries of the Blessed Virgin for Every Day in the Month of May'

Meditation II

On the End of Man

In order to obtain a real fruit from the series of meditations upon which we are now going to enter, it is necessary to commence with what is truly called the foundation of the whole spiritual life. The strength and endurance of a material house depend much, almost entirely, upon the plan of the foundations, and the manner in which they are laid. And not less so is it requisite to build upon a secure basis, and to set to work in earnest from the first, if we wish to raise surely and solidly the spiritual edifice of our souls.

To-day, therefore, let us begin by considering the end for which we were created. In the first place we must recall to our memory, that "man was created to praise, reverence, and serve his God, and by this means to save his soul." (1) And, we may ask ourselves, who was it that created us but God, Whose majesty and goodness are infinite? He need not have created us: for He was perfect without us. We are therefore the work of His pure mercy; and hence, as His bondsmen and slaves, we are obliged, whether we like it or not, to love and serve Him, and obey Him in this life. But Almighty God, in His endless love for man, has added besides a supreme reward in the next world, to be gained by those who obey Him in this. Thus, not only is it our duty to serve God here; but, having served Him, it is our privilege to be happy with Him for ever hereafter. Oh, how much has He loved us, to have drawn us out of nothing with so high an object in view as the eternal glory of Heaven! Where were we, any of us - the greatest, the best, but a few years ago! And to what great things does not God call us, but some few years hence - the least, the poorest, the very worst amongst us! Truly life is a dream, and nothing is great but God alone. Let us reflect earnestly how we have lived up to this great end. Have we spent our life in hunting after honours and riches - in seeking whatever pleasure this world may afford us - not thinking whether it was lawful or not, but caring only for our own indulgence? If so, we have gone blindly astray from the path marked out to us; we have been ungrateful to God, for the priceless blessings we hold from Him. To remember that God, the Great and the Good, is the sole object worth seeking or gaining; and to think of the little, perchance, we may hitherto

have done towards so high an end, is in very deed a startling reminder for a Christian soul.

Again, we must think how much we shall lose, by not keeping always before us the end for which we were created. Our Blessed Lord has said, "What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (2) And, in truth, supposing we do gain everything we desire here on earth, which yet never happens, what is all this compared to the loss of God, or the value of but one soul amongst us? Yet, he who seeks but the enjoyment of this life - who loves to be honoured and praised - to live at ease and in luxury, will most certainly lose his soul and his God. Oh, how ought we not even to fear the pleasures and allurements of the world, if they so easily take us from our true end, which is God! "No man can serve two masters - God and the world:" (3) but have we not tried to do so hitherto? Have we not been of those, who imagine they can give a small part of their hearts to God, whilst with the rest they serve the devil? And is this enough? Oh, no. God is our *only* end. For, let a man become rich or powerful: let him obtain influence over others; let him be honoured and exalted above his fellow - creatures, with many advantages of body and mind - when he comes to die, what will all this profit him, if he has not served God alone? "Remember thy last end and thou shalt never sin," (4) say the Holy Scriptures, and "Remember man, that thou art dust, and unto dust shalt thou return," repeats Holy Church - and truly. For, there may be those who remain impassible to all argument, whose heart cannot be touched by the most moving points of the Christian religion: but let such persons recollect the goal to which they are tending, let them but constantly bear in mind that they are to die, and as experience tells us, the fruit of such a thought is greater than the listening to many sermons, the reading good books, or even than a deep knowledge of Holy Scripture itself. And why? For the simplest reason. Because death is an inexorable master, who allows nothing to follow us beyond the grave. There is it that the rich man is stripped of his wealth, the eloquent become dumb, the noble is crushed in the dust, the proud man humbled. And what find we in death? Not earthly pleasures, not worldly honours, not power, nor influence over others, for this earth has faded from our eyes; all that was enjoyable, all that contributed to temporal happiness, all is left behind, - and what find we but God? God, therefore, and He alone, is the true end of our life.

How plainly this appears, if we only take the opposite course, and try to serve creatures or make them serve us! After a first pleasure is gone, we are never but miserably deceived and disappointed. A holy writer has said, - "Dispose and order all things as thou desirest, and as it seemeth

right to thee, and thou wilt find nought but suffering;" (5) but "to serve God is to possess a kingdom," which means that he who serves God as his *last* end, and looks to *Him* for all, shall obtain all things even in this life.

Let us remember the end for which we were created - namely, "to praise, reverence, and to serve God, and by this means to save our souls." God alone has a right to our service: for it is written, "Him only shalt thou serve." (6) Therefore, every creature that stands between us and God, or that takes us from Him in any manner whatever, is to be shunned and detested as an agent of the devil. By a little reflection, we can discover how far we may have been guilty in this respect. Has anything been keeping us from God? and if so, what is it? Is it a bad companion, or an unlawful connexion, or some employment that is causing us to neglect our religion, or that places us in the dangerous occasions of sin? Is it pride, vanity, or ambition, or avarice, or any unbridled attachment to any person or thing, or a sinful habit? If these, or any others, be the chains that bind us, let us tear ourselves away from them without delay. But what sin is it that has stood us in the place of serving God, and saving our souls? It matters little what it is, if by committing it, we are thus diverted from the real end of our life: what colour soever it may assume, of a certainty it is the enemy of God, and therefore to be cut off, or we must lose our souls, and "what doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul ?" (7) Oh, let us think of this: and when we have thought of it, let us resolve that nothing shall ever separate us from the only object in life worth contending for, the love and service of God.

Those who lack courage in this warfare, may find an effective help by contemplating the glorious example of Our Blessed Lady. The assistance of so great an advocate as the Mother of God is very valuable, and as potent with us as it is valuable in itself, if we but strive to imitate her virtues. We determine to-day to look more closely into the state of our souls, and examine thoroughly how far we have strayed from our last end - how much we have been blinded by pleasures, and the creatures of this world. But it is hard to do so; for this life is a warfare, and, as St. Paul assures us, one in which we shall not conquer without much labour. To animate us in the struggle, look up to Mary, the Mother of God, the Gate of Heaven, the Morning Star. Well may she be our model; for, beautiful and fair though she be, the most perfect of God's creatures, she was yet ever a creature, a journeyer like us in this vale of tears. And did she not keep her end - the true end of her existence, always before her? Who is comparable to her in this? And to what glory has she not been raised, because of her simple fidelity to this great truth? Let us ask Our Lady, therefore, continually to help us in keeping before our minds that we

have come into this world for no other object, than to serve God here and to be happy with Him hereafter.

VISIT TO A SANCTUARY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN

We may now, in spirit, pay a devout visit to the celebrated sanctuary of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, where, from the earliest times of Christianity down to the present day, a pious remembrance and veneration for the Mother of God has ever been retained. The sanctuary is situated upon ground once hallowed by the Prophet Elias and his disciples, who dwelt there. A magnificent church and a monastery of Carmelite friars, now stand in the holy spot. Doubtless the beautiful Month of May is well spent in that place, where the presiding recollections suggest at every step respect and love for Mary. The monks who inhabit it, take the name of their order from the mountain itself. They are known as the " Friars of Our Lady of Mount Carmel," and the order is noted for its devotion to the Blessed Virgin. The Brown Scapular, which is worn by so many pious Christians, forms a part of their religious habit. Let us go to-day at least in spirit, where we cannot go in fact, and join the good brethren in the prayers and praises they offer to Mary.

PRAYER OF FATHER CHRISTOPHER MAYER

O Mother most merciful, do thou supply for me whatever is imperfect in the offering which I am making to thy beloved Son. May I thus learn to know thee as my Mother. O most clement Jesus, receive Thou this prayer from the hands of Thy Blessed Mother: and when Thou hast united it to Thy merits, to her merits, and to those of all the Saints, do Thou present it to the Eternal Father for every pious, holy, and useful end. O Father, look Thou upon the Face of Thy well-beloved Son, and have mercy upon us, according to Thy good pleasure, to Thy greater and eternal glory. Amen.

(1) St. Ignatius's Exercises: "The Foundation."
(2) St. Matthew, xvi. 26
(3) St. Matthew, vi. 24
(4) Eccles. vii.
(5) Imitation of Christ, Book 2. chap. xii.
(6) St. Matthew, iv. 10.
(7) St. Matthew, xvi. 26

Return to the First Meditation . . . *Proceed to the Third Meditation. . .*

Saints' Prayers

selected from the annals of history unto our current day

Meditations

Meditations by Rev. John Wyse

from the book

'Devout Exercises: Compromising Meditations and Visits to the Sanctuaries of the Blessed Virgin for Every Day in the Month of May'

Meditation III

On the Spirit in Which We are to Make Use of This World

Yesterday we endeavoured to call to mind the true and sole end of our existence: and having seen that it was God, and He only, both in this life and the next, we tried to reflect how far we had strayed from this path, and what had kept us from God. We resolved, moreover, that henceforth, cost what it might, nothing should be able to separate us from the service of God here, and eternal happiness with Him hereafter.

Let us now draw a practical conclusion from these thoughts. Not only was man created for the one object of serving God and saving his soul, but everything else on earth was created for the same end, that is, as a help to man in attaining the final end of his creation. Oh, how good a Father our God has been to us! He created everything necessary to preserve our life: and besides this, numberless creatures are called into being, solely that we might glorify God by such means, and thus save our souls. How many beautiful and various sights has He not given to our eyes: what sweet and harmonious sounds to our ears, what fragrant odours, how many substances delicious and enjoyable to the sense of

taste and of touch, has not God created for us! And all this to assist us in praising Him, and saving our souls! Then let us look and see how faithfully all these creatures fulfil the end for which God made them; how the horse draws his load, or carries his rider; how the cow gives her milk; how the sheep yields its wool to clothe us; how the fishes are taken, and the oxen slaughtered; how the very birds of the air sing the praises of God! Do they not all, faithfully and without complaint, serve us and nourish us, because God so commanded? Even so it is. What a lesson for us: and let it teach us that nothing is created on this earth, but for the sole object of serving God, and helping us to save our souls. God intended them all for His own glory, and for our salvation. Hence if we pervert them to any other use whatever, we are going directly against the commands of God, and endangering our own souls. A short consideration will easily show us how far we may have made use of this world, contrary to the intentions of Almighty God, and at the risk of eternal salvation. When any one finds on reflection, that he has lost sight of his true end as the creature of God, he may be quite sure that his sin arises either from a too great attachment to pleasures, honours, and the comforts of this life, or from an unwillingness to bear that which is painful and trying. In the first case, "Self," and everything comprised in that word, is so evidently served and cared for instead of God, that it needs but a moment's reflection to see how, as a natural consequence, the real end of man is soon wholly lost sight of. But in the second, it is often still more the case: for poverty and bodily pain, sickness or insults, so readily awaken lowness of spirits, a certain horror of suffering, and even a murmuring against God, that never is it so easy to lose sight of the real end of man, as when our bodies or minds are worn out and afflicted.

To keep, therefore, our last aim and end effectively before us, it is necessary to place our hearts into a state of entire indifference, so as to be able to resist the most pleasurable enjoyment if contrary to our last end, and to embrace willingly the hardest and most opprobrious state of life, if such only help us in obtaining it.

The supreme power which Almighty God possesses over all His creatures, obliges us to this indifference. We have to serve God, not in the particular way that it may please us, but as it pleases Him. We have not to decide how God is to be served, but He Himself: for God is the Ruler, and we are the servants. Even the angels in heaven must obey God; and shall poor miserable men presume to be choosers in any, when angels obey in all things? But the power of God is so great, that there are no limits to it. He made us, and we are His creatures: and who shall dare to say that He cannot act with us as He wills? A workman takes his work

and uses it, or lays it aside, or uses it again, or throws it away, and destroys it, just as he has a mind: and shall not God do with His work what He will? In short, God can place us where He will, and treat us as He will. Be our lot therefore what it may, it is always our end to praise and to love Him: and to praise and love God is nothing else than to do His Holy Will. But, can any one say he is doing the will of God, if he is not ready to receive with an equal grace health or sickness, happiness or trouble? How often do people, exclaim, in their fancied piety, that they are ready to love God - but how? Perhaps they are in the enjoyment of worldly blessings, and nothing occurs to disturb them. It is not difficult for such to imagine that they love God, when they have no sacrifice to make, or when it costs them no pain or trouble. But are they willing to bless God equally in sickness and health, in poverty and in riches, when they are despised and insulted, as well as in honour? In a word, are they indifferent to all that happens, praising God in all? If not, they are not yet fulfilling the end of their existence, namely in serving God, and thus saving their souls."

We conclude from these reflections, that to serve Almighty God truly and sincerely, we must be perfectly content in whatever station or position He is pleased to place us. When we are well, we must be ready for sickness - when we are sick, we must not be impatient to get well: if we are rich,we must not grumble if God should reduce us even to the most abject misery: and in poverty, we have no right to envy or desire riches. To be despised or to be honoured must be the same to us; and whether we are neglected or abused, or placed high over others, God is equally to be praised for all. This is serving God in earnest.

But besides, we should look upon our Creator as the God of Providence, as Him by Whose hand all things are directed and disposed in all places. It is of faith, that nothing happens by chance or without the divine permission. Hence if a man be sick, or in robust health, or if he be rich and another man poor, it is the same God that disposes and rules all. If to-day we are in honour, and to-morrow despised and insulted, it is because God wishes it: and is it not better to endure cheerfully the greatest misery, if such be the will of God, than to be free from all trouble, to please one's self which never yet comes to pass, as experience shows that he who seeks but the will of God, is infinitely more happy, even in his wretchedness, than the mere pleasure-hunter who looks but to "Self" in all things.

This then is the secret of real happiness, both here and hereafter - indifference to whatever befalls us, so long as we but recognize there the

will of our heavenly Father. We may say prayers without end, and be ever making resolutions: but no one has learned to use with profit the creatures of this life, and by such means to save his soul, - unless he knows how to detach himself from the world in the very midst of pleasures and honours, so as to be ready to abandon them, when God so commands - unless he be perfectly willing to embrace whatever crosses and humiliations may be sent him. The nearer we approach this standard, the more surely are we living up to the only end of man on earth: and if thus we learn to use His creatures, for His glory and for our own salvation, God in His turn will bestow such a happiness upon us, even here below, that none can know but those who have tried it.

In order to strengthen the resolve we now make to live in this manner, let us fervently invoke the help of Our Blessed Lady. Consider, for our comfort, that if she is now the highest in heaven, she was once amongst the lowly ones on earth - that if she is now in glory, seated on the most resplendent throne after that of God, it is because she ever lived in perfect conformity to the divine will, suffering all things, enduring all things - and who, except her divine Son, ever endured or suffered as she did? - yet desiring nothing beyond it, content in all, and to the last praising God for all. "O Mary, most perfect of creatures! procure for us the priceless grace of ever keeping before us the true end of our existence, that so we may become indifferent to all that God sends us, desiring nothing but to be able to obey Him, love Him, and praise Him in every place and for everything - and that thus we may save our souls."

VISIT TO A SANCTUARY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN

Constantinople, by reason of the multitude of churches erected there to the honour of Mary, was once known by the glorious name of "the City of the Mother of God." The most beautiful of these churches was built by the Empress Pulcheria, immediately after the famous Council of Ephesus: and there was hardly a street or any house of importance, that did not possess its church or chapel dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. How must not Mary have been loved and venerated, in that once holy city. But now how changed! a foreign and unchristian race have for centuries polluted and destroyed the sanctuary of the Mother of God, they knew her not, and in Constantinople there is kept no month of Mary. We cannot go there joyfully, as we may to other sanctuaries. We can but weep, that a savage horde should possess the heritage of the Mother of all Christendom. Let us travel thither, however, in company with the spirits of our pious forefathers, and in spirit let us live again through the early

centuries of the Church, when love for Mary shone so brightly in the hearts of men, that a whole town was made her sanctuary.

PRAYER OF ST. GERMANUS, PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE

O mine only and sovereign Lady, who art the sole consolation I receive from God: thou, who art the heavenly dew that doth refresh me in my sufferings: thou, who art the light of my soul when it is surrounded with darkness: thou, who art my guide when I travel, my strength in weakness, my treasure in poverty, the balm of my wounds, my comfort in affliction, my refuge in misery, the hope of my salvation! O hear thou my prayers, have pity on me, as becometh the Mother of a God Who has such love for men I Make me worthy to enjoy with thee that great happiness which thou dost enjoy in heaven. I know that, being the mother of God, thou canst, if thou wilt, obtain it for me. O Mary, thou art omnipotent to save sinners, nor needest thou any other recommendation: for thou art the Mother of true life. Amen.

Return to the Second Meditation . . . *Proceed to the Fourth Meditation. . .*

Saints' Prayers

selected from the annals of history unto our current day

Meditations

Meditations by Rev. John Wyse

from the book

'Devout Exercises: Compromising Meditations and Visits to the Sanctuaries of the Blessed Virgin for Every Day in the Month of May'

Meditation IV

On the Sin of the Angels

The meditation of to-day will take us a step further, in the work of examining the state of our souls. Having seen that man has but one end in life, and that everything else is merely a means to that end, whether it brings us pleasure or suffering, and consequently to be embraced with equal submission and cheerfulness, it follows, that he who does not carry out this rule in his actions, is offending God, or in other words committing sin. Sin, therefore, is the great and only evil of the world, and the whole energies of a religious mind are required to rid one's self of it. Thus let us endeavour, first, to obtain some knowledge of the nature of this great evil, by contemplating the fruits of sin in the fall of the angels from heaven. Let us go back a little with the mind of our faith, and look into that wondrous space of time, when God created heaven and filled it with angels. What can be conceived happier and more enjoyable, than the state of those spirits ? Their beauty was such, that no mortal could have gazed upon it without dying for joy. Their wisdom was so great and so clear, that the wisdom of Solomon, though divinely infused, was yet a very ignorance compared to it. The utmost amount of happiness was their portion of an existence, which knew not pain or sorrow. Added to this, they possessed the fullest and most intimate knowledge of God, and were linked with Him in a perfect bond of love and friendship. Such, and even far beyond these, were the gifts and graces of the angels; yet such gifts and graces did those angels abuse. They would not serve God, as He willed they should - they sinned, and were punished. Now, let us consider the quality and nature of their punishment.

These unhappy angels were changed, in one instant, from the most beautiful of beings into the most horrible devils - from the loveliest and most beloved of the children of God, into the objects of His eternal hatred.

They were cast down from their seats in heaven, into the very bottom of the abyss of hell: and there, from that moment they have endured, are enduring, and will ever endure, all that it is possible to suffer - the biting and sorrowful remorse for the past, the most fearful despair of the future. Instead of the bright intellect of their first existence, a darksome night lies as a curse upon their blurred understandings, whilst their entire powers are eaten up with the flame of a fire, that burns without destroying.

This direful punishment was the effect of God's justice. Had it pleased Him to grant the falling angels but a moment of time, without doubt they

would have instantly repented of their sin, and have served and loved Him to all eternity. But the justice of God would not allow it. They received no mercy.

And there was no atonement for this sin. These miserable spirits had burned for more than four thousand years, before Christ became man to redeem the world. Did their punishment end then? Oh, no. That loving Saviour, Who shed so many tears over the city of Jerusalem, shed no tear for them. That Heart of Jesus, pierced and wrung, Whose Precious Blood flowed in streams for us - that tender heart had not one single throb for them. Unfortunate - thrice unfortunate spirits! they sinned but for a moment, and their punishment is for ever, for ever, and for ever.

Now may we cast one glance into that fiery prison which holds them. Behold their frightful look and appearance, so terrible that man cannot even fancy it without horror: behold their pains and agonies, so great that no human mind can conceive them. And when we have looked upon them, let us say to ourselves - these cursed beings, these hideous objects - these monsters, were they not once the chosen children of God? were they not, in their entrancing beauty, the very masterpieces of His almighty power - the inmates of heaven? What have they done then, to suffer such misery? They committed a sin. But their sin was momentary - a single sin, one sinful thought - a sin of disobedience: and for that one sin, already they have been burning near six thousand years in hell. And who has passed a sentence so severe, and so awful, upon them? God! O most terrible of truths: Almighty God Himself! But God is infinitely just, and infinitely good and merciful. It follows, then, that sin is the most dreadsome evil, since it is accompanied by so terrible a punishment. If such is the fate of the angels of heaven for one sin, what are we to think when we look to our own sins? Which, indeed shall excite in us the greatest astonishment, the rigour of God's justice to the fallen angels, or the fulness of His mercy to us? Those beautiful ones of heaven commit but a single sin, and they are cast for ever into hell: and we, who are but dust of the earth, have committed sins without number - and yet He has had mercy on us! and again we committed sin, once more we abused His mercy, and again did He spare us. Even now, as we stand here, is He not stretching out the arms of His love towards us? O patience, admirable and enduring, of the Lord Our God! May His Name be ever praised for it!

Whoever has sinned but once, mortally, in his life may speak thus truly to his soul: "I have offended a God that has loved me more than thousands and millions of the noblest of beings -- a God, that has sheltered me with His almighty arm, even in the midst of my sins - a God, that still proffers

me a tender love, despite my sins: and, O my soul, how couldst thou have despised and scorned so great a love? and canst thou yet continue to sin in His sight? Oh no: I see how great an evil sin is - and what must mine have been in Thy sight, O Jesus! My God, my Saviour, I acknowledge my sins, I hate them, I curse them from this hour." Thus may we all discourse with our souls: for who can sin again before heaven, if he thinks of the lost angels, and the long night of their punishment in hell? Have we not perhaps deserved the same, not once, but hundreds of times? and where might we be now, were it not for the infinite mercy of God? Let us leave nothing undone, to avoid in future so great an evil. But when sin, with its thousand allurements, seduces and tempts us, to whom then shall we recur for help? to whom, but to the most Blessed Mary ever a Virgin, conceived without sin?

If God so hates sin, and if the only bar to His love is sin, how must He not love her, whose soul was never stained with its approach! If again, our good God has loved us so much, notwithstanding our sins, what love can we imagine too great for Mary, who never either by original or actual sin gave Him cause to reject her ? Let us then call confidently upon Our Blessed Lady, and beseech her to obtain for us a freedom from this great evil, to keep us from the occasions of sin, to procure us grace to resist it, to watch over us, to guard us, to pray for us, and never to desist in the assistance she gives us, till she has brought our souls, sinless and white as we received them in baptism, to the eternal gates of heaven.

VISIT TO A SANCTUARY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN

Whither, at present, can we better speed to pay our spiritual visit to Mary, than to the glorious church of St. Peter in Home? The Eternal City is conspicuous for its devotion to the Blessed Virgin, and any one who has been there, is well cognizant of the filial love and genuine piety of the Roman people in this regard. They call her affectionately "Mamma mia," or "My Mother," or else they address her reverentially by the title of "Madonna," or "My Lady," and withal so unrestrainedly and naturally, that it is easy to see how perfectly a part of his very system, is love for Mary, to an inhabitant of Rome. Everything is done there, that can be done to honour the Blessed Virgin: her numerous churches are thronged: the devotions and novenas in her honour well attended: the public business is regulated by the sound of the bell, that rings out the Ave Maria: the very atmosphere of Rome breathes devotion to Mary: and although the principal church of Rome, the Cathedral of the world, is not dedicated to her, it yet glories in the guardianship of Mary. It was in this church on the 8th of December, in the year of grace 1854, amid the

acclamations of thousands, and surrounded by the representative bishops of all countries in the world, that our Holy Father the Pope, in virtue of the power given him by Christ, defined and proclaimed that Mary ever Virgin, the Mother of God, had been conceived without sin, that she had formed an exception to the common rule of the children of Eve, that she had never known the great evil - sin. O glorious church of St. Peter, glorious because of its noble expanse and majestic proportions: doubly glorious because the Cathedral of the Vicar of Christ on earth, and as containing the relics of the holy Apostles: but thrice glorious, because beneath its vast dome, and within its hallowed walls, were first heard those words, which publicly recognized and proclaimed, as an article of faith, the brightest gem in the crown of Mary! Let us travel there in spirit, and praise God, that so great a glory has been conferred on His Church in these days: and let us bless that sanctuary of Mary, whose privilege it was to receive first the divine accents, as like the manna of old they descended to us from heaven.

PRAYER OF SAINT ALPHONSUS

O my immaculate Lady! I rejoice with thee, on seeing thee enriched with so great a purity. I do thank, and resolve always to thank, our common Creator for having preserved thee from every stain of sin: and I firmly believe this doctrine, and am prepared even to lay down my life, should this be necessary, in defence of this thy so great and singular privilege of being conceived without sin O most sweet, most amiable, immaculate Mary, thou who art so beautiful in the eyes of thy Lord, disdain not to cast thine eyes of compassion on the wounds of my soul, loathsome as they are. Behold me, have pity on me, heal me . . . O thou, who from the first moment of thy life didst appear pure and beautiful before God, pity me, who not only was born in sin, but who again since baptism have stained my soul with crimes. What favour will God ever refuse thee Who chose thee for His Daughter, His Mother, and Spouse, and therefore preserved thee from every stain, and in His love preferred thee to all other creatures? Amen.

Return to the Third Meditation . . . *Proceed to the Fifth Meditation. . .*

Saints' Prayers

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Meditations by Rev. John Wyse

from the book

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Meditation V

On the Sin of Our First Parents

Let us try once more to obtain for ourselves some knowledge of the infinite malice of mortal sin, by considering the sin of our first parents, and how Almighty God punished it.

Never, since the beginning of the world, has so great a happiness been enjoyed on earth, as by Adam and Eve, when God placed them in the garden of paradise. Thither came neither heat nor cold, nor rain, nor wind: a delightful sunshine was ever beaming upon the inhabitants of that favoured spot: no labour was wanting to till the ground: the trees brought forth their fruits of themselves, and the earth yielded abundantly the most luxuriant plants and flowers. Our first parents had bestowed upon them a complete power over all created animals, so that at their only word the birds, the very fishes, and every living creature came and went as they commanded them. They had bodies like ours, yet different: for they never endured fatigue, nor suffered pain or sickness, and the fear of death, or the cares and weakness of old age, were unknown to them. Their souls also were like ours, yet so different: for constituted as they were in a state of original justice, they possessed a perfect mastery over all their passions, so that neither sorrow, nor anger, nor envy, nor hatred, nor any other undue feeling had power to rule them. They were gifted with an intimate knowledge of God, and with a most ardent love for Him. Lastly, they could look forward after a long and happy life to a passing, without sickness or death, body and soul united, to heaven, there to reign with God to all eternity. In the Holy Scriptures we read,

that God created them only "a little less than the angels in dignity." But like some amongst that heavenly host, they were as ungrateful to God, as God had been gracious to them. They would not serve Him in the manner He wished. They sinned: and were punished.

Let us now recall all the circumstances and results of their punishment, and endeavour to see thence the character of the sin committed. - Because of this one sin, Adam and Eve were driven out of Paradise: the earth has been cursed, and has become incapable of producing anything without intense labour at the sweat of the brow: our bodies have been cursed, and condemned to infirmities, acute pains, ending only with the sting of death. - Moreover, because of this one sin, many thousands and millions of men, the children of Adam, have had to endure much suffering in life, and to meet finally with a bitter death. We may imagine an immense tract of country, as long as it is broad, covered all over with the bones and corpses of-the dead and dying, which rise upwards for miles in the air, and say to ourselves "All this has happened on account of one sin." - Again, because of this single sin, not only must every man die, but the greater part of mankind are condemned to hell. For why are men damned, but because they have yielded to the evil dispositions of our corrupted nature, which is the result of this sin? Thousands and millions condemned to hell every year because of one sin! - Also, because of this one sin, Our Blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Lamb without spot, the only begotten Son of God, has become Man, and suffered on earth, and has shed the last drop of His blood for us on the altar of the cross. - Lastly, because of this single sin of our first parents, Paradise has been lost to us, and we are wanderers hither and thither in this vale of tears: our life is full of trouble and bitterness, and we shrink from death with fear and trembling: we are not sure if we shall be saved, and, in all cases, we can never enter heaven but by the road of tears and penance. - Such is a faint idea of the woeful punishment which Adam and Eve brought down upon their children by one sin. An idea we call it; because no man on earth can comprehend, in its entirety, the real nature of the curse with which God cursed our first parents.

What inference must we now draw for ourselves? This - namely, that if a single sin has been such a blot in the sight of God, what a horrible object must be the state of a sinning soul! Whoever has committed but one mortal sin, has committed as many as one of the demons in hell; and if he has committed a hundred, he has committed as many sins as a hundred of those demons, and his soul is in one sense as abominable before God as all that number of damned spirits together. - Still further. When a man has committed but a single mortal sin, he has deserved hell as much as

any one of those lost spirits; and when he has committed more than one such sin, he has merited hell more than any one of the lost spirits. How comes it then, that every man that has sinned mortally, but once even, is not now in company with the devils burning eternally in hell? How comes it? Aye, well may we ask the question. It is solely because our common Creator has dealt out His mercy to us, whilst upon them fell the exercise of His divine justice. O the love, the goodness, the infinite patience of our God!

What great truths, therefore, does not our holy Faith teach us, with regard to the malicious nature of sin! and who that has sinned can think of them without, on the one hand, shuddering with fear at the thought of his own soul, and on the other without thanking heartily his God for the boundless mercy shown to him! The most beautiful of the angels fell from heaven, the whole race of mankind were cast out of Paradise, hosts upon hosts - of souls are now burning in the flames of hell, Jesus the Son of God died upon the cross - and all by reason of one single sin committed! Oh, what must be the state of a soul in mortal sin: what an awful amount of evil must he hidden there I and if God spared not the angels, nor our first parents, nor even His own Son, what think we may be the lot of those, whose souls are monsters of sin, who have scorned the voice of the messengers whom God sent to call them to repentance, who, after being so often pardoned, have so often fallen back again. With great fear should not such a sinner fly at once to God, and thus, from his innermost soul, beseech Him saying - "O Lord my God, and Creator! have mercy once more, have mercy on me. I now see how terrible an evil sin is. I see it in the fire and the torments of the lost souls in hell - I see it in all the misery and wretchedness around me on earth, the consequence of sin - I see it in the pains and martyrdom of my dying Lord on the cross. O dreadful thought! that I, by my sins, should have caused the death of the loving Jesus! O sin, accursed sin I never more will I commit, never more will I harbour thee, or yield to thine evil temptations. Away for ever with sin, and by Thy mercy, O Jesus, may no such evil again separate me from the love and service I owe to God."

In conclusion, let us invoke with heartfelt devotion the patronage of Our Blessed Lady, Refuge of Sinners. Where is the sinner, however grievously he may have sinned, that cannot find rest in the Immaculate Heart of her who is the Mother of the God of Mercy, in that tender Heart, ever inseparably united with the Heart of Jesus flowing for us poor sinners! Let us all approach then with confidence, and ask Our Blessed Lady to obtain for us the especial grace of entertaining for the future such an

extreme horror for the greatest of evils - sin, that we may be able to resolve rather to die than commit one sin again.

VISIT TO A SANCTUARY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

Our Lady of Sarrances is one of the many sanctuaries, which Southern France possesses. It is situated in the diocese of Bayonne in the Lower Pyrenees, almost on the borders of the two Catholic countries of France and Spain. On the banks of the Gave, at the further extremity of a lovely valley, in a holy solitude, lie the church and monastery of "Notre Dame" or "Our Lady of Sarrances." The origin of this romantic sanctuary is scarcely known. Some have thought, that it can be traced back to a period in the ninth century. One thing is certain, however, that long before the ravages of the so-called Reformation in that country, Our Lady of Sarrances was a place of great devotion to high and low, rich and poor. It is recorded, that the two kings of Navarre and Arragon, and the sovereign prince of Beam, having met by chance on the occasion of a pilgrimage to this Sanctuary, were much struck at an encounter so apparently providential, and calling to mind the visit of the three kings to the stable of Bethlehem, they placed themselves under the special protection of the Queen of Heaven, and made rich offerings at the Sanctuary. A great many more traits of devotion could be brought forward, to prove the great love of our forefathers to Our Lady of Sarrances. But these happy days were not of long duration: the foul heresy of Calvin was let loose on that unfortunate country, and in its time the abbey of Sarrances, and the Sanctuary itself, were pillaged and burnt. There was desolation in the holy place till about the beginning of the seventeenth century, when, by the zeal of the King of France, the Catholic religion having been restored to the territory of Beam, the church of Our Lady was rebuilt, the monastery reestablished, the image of Mary replaced, and the pious inhabitants, with tears of joy, as it is related, gave back to her the worship which their fathers had handed down to them. The church and the monastery were confided to the monks of the order of Premontre, and these monuments still exist to testify by their magnificence to the faith of our ancestors. The Sanctuary suffered, of course, in the old French Revolution, but not over much; and the devotion and pilgrimage are still, to a certain extent, vigorous. The principal feast of the pilgrimage is the 15th of August, the festival of Our Lady's Assumption into heaven; and a good Christian gentleman, who was present at the Sanctuary, in 1842, on that day, described it as well and numerously attended. And if it was so then, certainly it must have wonderfully increased since, now that religion has taken such a stand in

France. Let us join the devout groups assembled there in this Month of May, and let us send up a good prayer in spirit to Our Lady of Sarrances.

PRAYER OF ST. BERNARD

O thou, who art Our Lady, our mediator, our advocate, do thou reconcile us - do thou commend us to thy Son. O thou, who art blessed by the grace which thou didst find, by the privilege which thou didst merit, by that mercy to which thou didst give birth, O grant that He Who, through thee, deigned to partake of our infirmity and misery, may also, by thine intercession, make us partakers of His happiness and glory. Amen.

Return to the Fourth Meditation . . . *Proceed to the Sixth Meditation. . .*

Saints' Prayers

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Meditations

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Meditation VI

On Our Own Sins

Having contemplated the great evil of sin, by viewing the consequences which have followed the sin of the angels, and that of our first parents, we yet must not leave this subject until we have witnessed the effects which sin produces in the soul of man. Of little use is it, indeed, to reflect

upon the sins of others, unless likewise we look to our own souls, and examine how we may have resembled those, whose dreadful example has already come before us.

Let us behold then for a moment the soul of a man, who has been unhappy enough to fall into mortal sin.

The very instant he committed that sin, his soul, from a beautiful image of God, became changed into an abominable monster. No one in this world, without a special revelation, can ever understand the surpassing beauty of a soul in the grace of God. Hut in proportion as it is beautiful in grace, so docs it become horrible by the commission of sin. In one sense, there is little difference between a damned soul, and a soul in mortal sin: for, as no human being could look upon a demon without falling dead through terror, so in like manner, if a soul in mortal sin were revealed to our eyes, we should die for very fear at the sight.

The instant a mortal sin is committed, the soul of him who committed it becomes possessed with the spirit of the devil. It is a lamentable thing for any Christian to be possessed by a devil, to have to carry day and night in his body one of the lost spirits of hell: what must it be then, in fact, to deliver one's soul itself over to the power of the devil! He who is possessed by an evil spirit, may still be a child of God, and can freely hope one day to obtain heaven: but he who has delivered his soul over to the power of the devil by mortal sin, is the enemy of God, and stands in imminent danger of being cast down every moment into hell.

But can anything be more shameful than sin? Let us suppose that Almighty God should so open our eyes as to enable us to see into the heart of any one amongst us, to perceive distinctly all the sins and crimes which that person had committed in thought, word, or deed, through the long course of his life. What a shame, what a disgrace fur that poor soul I Would he not seek to hide himself, and call upon the mountains to cover him, rather than that his fellow - men should see his face? and this would be but the righteous judgment of his own conscience. And does not God see into every thought and secret feeling of the heart? If a soul in mortal sin would flee then for shame from the sight of men, how much more truly shameful is it not in the sight of Almighty God!

Further: we shall understand better the greatness of the evil of sin in our souls, if we but consider what poor miserable creatures we are in ourselves, and how utterly dependent on God. What are we, in fact? a handful of clay: a few years ago we were nothing, no one had ever heard

of us: a short time hence, we shall be all rotting in the grave. And yet this worm of the earth, this dust, this miserable creature, has lifted its hand against God, has withstood the commands of its own Maker! - Besides, what has not God done for us? He has bestowed countless blessings upon us, so that there is no moment in our whole lives, day or night, in which He has not given us some new blessing, nor will there ever come a moment of our lives on earth in which He will not still bless us. All this He has done for us, with an infinite love: and the while, He might have dealt out to others the graces He gave to us - to others, who, perhaps, - deserved them better - to others, who would have served Him better with them. Indeed, so much have we from God, that we depend entirely on Him. What ingratitude then, nay, what insanity to sin against His divine Majesty! Supposing that the paralytic in the Gospel had turned round after his cure, and struck the Sacred Person of Our Lord, with the very hands that were healed by Jesus; or supposing, that the man deaf and dumb from his childhood, whose tongue Our Blessed Lord Himself let loose, had begun with that very tongue to insult and blaspheme Him when dying on the Cross, - "what a horrible ingratitude!" we should say. But say again, who was it that created those tongues that are ever insulting God? who made those eyes, those ears, and hands, who made all the members of our body, and who formed our soul? - and we are ungrateful enough to offend that Maker!

Again, by committing sin, a man insults the great Majesty of God. To strike one's fellow - citizen is an offence against the law: but how much greater that offence, if directed against the person of the Sovereign. Oh, what a crime must then sin be! for who is God, but the King of kings, and the Lord of lords? God is infinitely good, infinitely holy, infinitely powerful, infinitely beautiful, just, merciful, infinite in all His perfections, and all that is good in creatures springs from Him. Nothing is good without Him, nothing holy, nothing beautiful, nothing just. With Him all is happiness, loveliness, goodness, and mercy, in an infinite degree. And to think that we have offended so great a Good, wilfully and with malice! Let us turn towards heaven, and represent to our minds that which is now passing there. See Almighty God Himself upon His throne, surrounded upon every side by legions of angels and saints - see them entranced as they gaze on His splendour and glory - see how they praise and magnify Him, each and every one, with all the power and nobleness of a heavenly spirit, and perceiving that enough of praise or love can never be given to so great a Majesty, these holy ones throw themselves upon their faces, confessing that He is worthy of far greater honour than they can ever give. But suddenly there arises in the midst of this mighty host of spirits, a miserable worm of the earth, that begins forthwith to

insult and dishonour the divine Majesty. Who can comprehend so great a crime? none but God: for the angels themselves, were they, with the whole wisdom of their understandings, to endeavour to comprehend it in all its magnitude, they could not. And a soul in mortal sin has committed that crime! Where does there exist an evil like to this? Sin then is the greatest of all evils. Oh, in the face of such truths as these, who is there that has sinned, once even, but should fly without delay to the throne of God for pardon? "O great God!" he should cry, "I see my sin. I have offended Thee: and who am I? not a Lucifer, not a seraph, not an angel, but a poor worldling, a wretched worm of this earth. And Thou, whom I have insulted, who art Thou? not a king, nor an angel, nor a seraph, but God, the highest Good, the Fountain of all Good, the Lord of Heaven and Earth. I have injured Thee: and where? perhaps secretly, when Thou wert absent - not so, but openly, before Thy very face. I have sinned against Thee: and by what means? with the very eyes, the very ears, the very tongue, the hands, the very body Thou Thyself didst give me. I have sinned against Thee: and for what? perhaps because I had been promised a kingdom, or at least with the hope of riches, or because I was driven to it by the fear of a cruel death - none of these; but, to indulge perchance some shameful pleasure, or because I feared some little humiliation or passing pain. I have sinned against Thee: and how often? not once, but ten, twenty, hundreds of times: and those perhaps at the very moment Thou wert preserving me in health and comfort, when for certain Thou wert pouring grace after grace on my soul, to prevent the devil from tearing me down into hell. O God of heaven, how great has been my wickedness!"

Let us now look back upon our own lives and see, whether we also ought not thus to run for forgiveness to God. Have we been unfortunate enough to commit mortal sin in our thoughts, words, or actions, let us try to remember the time, the first occasion, we fell from God. Oh, what an evil hour is that for a soul in life! the first mortal sin! how lovely and fair our soul, in all the purity and innocence of youth, a chaste and hallowed spirit, the sanctuary of the Holy Ghost, the image of God imprinted freshly upon it! With what benignant love does God look down upon that soul: what glory it must give to God, and what pleasure to the angels and saints: and the angel guardian of that soul, what joy does there not beam from his celestial countenance, as he delights to lead it, and watch it, pray with it, and protect it! Can we not almost fancy him returning, every now and then, from earth to heaven, to recount his happiness, and to relate how there exists on earth at least one soul - his dear charge - free from sin and preparing for heaven. But the first mortal sin! Oh, that fatal moment! a beautiful soul has become changed into a hideous monster,

the enemy of God and His saints: - and the angel guardian of that soul, must not the very lustre of his throne become dimmed at the horrid sight? What a foul blot on a Christian soul is sin! Let us then shun it, and loathe it, and turn from it with disgust when it approaches; but above all, let us excite ourselves to a real contrition. If we have sinned against a God Who is infinitely good in Himself, and infinitely good to us, we have sinned shamefully, barefacedly, before the majesty of heaven, before the great God of the universe, Who made us.

What sorrow too deep to fill our hearts! Let us then turn a moment to Mary, and beseech her to pray for us poor sinners that we may receive the grace of true and hearty contrition. When we remember our sins, and at the same time call to mind the infinite majesty of Him we have offended, and the consequent magnitude of our sins, is it not a consolation to have Mary there to plead for us with her Son, we who are but miserable worms, defiled with sin, and unfit for the presence of so good and loving a God? Let us, therefore, confidently seek her: for she is indeed the "Health of the weak," "the Consoler of the afflicted" - and if in real earnest we wish to turn to God, she will be the "Morning Star" dawning upon us after the long dark night of our misery and sin.

VISIT TO A SANCTUARY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN

The visits which we make spiritually this month to Our Blessed Lady will conduct us to - day to the city of Ephesus, once so famous, but of which now there are few remains. It was in this city that the title of Mother of God, given to Mary, was fully approved and confirmed by a general council of the Church, held in the year of grace 431. The Catholic Church has always believed, that Mary was the Mother of Him, who united in His Sacred Person the nature of God and the nature of man - and that, therefore, she was truly called the Mother of God. But some impious heretics having denied it, the Council of Ephesus was held to confute and condemn them. It is related in history, that the people of Ephesus displayed the greatest anxiety about the result of that Council. They were loving servants of Mary, and their fear was therefore natural, lest by any chance the honour due to their Mother should be withheld her. But great was their exultation, when the bishops coming forth from the Council proclaimed Mary to be the Mother of God. Catching up the sound, they repeated it again and again with shouts of joy. Let us join our voices to that Christian multitude, and as we listen with the ear of faith to the glorious title, let us in our hearts determine to defend her honour evermore against those who blasphemously deny that Mary is the Mother of God.

PRAYER OF SAINT ATHANASIUS

Give ear to our prayers, O most holy Virgin! and be thou mindful of us. Dispense unto us those riches and that abundance of graces, with which thou art filled. The archangel saluted thee and called thee full of grace." All nations call thee "blessed." The whole hierarchy of heaven bless thee: and we, who are of the hierarchy of this earth, also address thee, saying, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Pray for us, O Mother of God, our Lady, our Queen." Amen.

Return to the Fifth Meditation... *Proceed to the Seventh Meditation...*

Saints' Prayers

selected from the annals of history unto our current day

Meditations

Meditations by Rev. John Wyse

from the book

'Devout Exercises: Compromising Meditations and Visits to the Sanctuaries of the Blessed Virgin for Every Day in the Month of May'

Meditation VII

On the Pain of "Loss" in Hell

Our meditations upon the great evil of sin have occupied us chiefly in considering the malignity of its nature, at first by means of the example of those who have fallen into sin, and again by contemplating the effects it produces in the soul of man. Such however is our weakness and misery, that even these truths, soul-stirring as they are, may yet fail in

exciting us to a true horror for sin, unless we furthermore arm ourselves with the "fear of the Lord," which, as the prophet tells us, is the "beginning of wisdom." (1) To become wise unto salvation, we must fear, not those who can only kill the body, but Him "Who, after He hath killed, hath power to cast into hell." (2) The fear of hell, therefore, is presented to us, that by remembering the dreadful punishment which awaits in the next world the commission of mortal sin, we may begin to hate sin and everything that leads to it.

The first pain we should think of in hell, and no doubt the greatest, is the pain of "Loss." By this we mean the loss of Almighty God. So great is this loss, that it is as surely impossible for our minds to comprehend it, as it may be to know fully in this world the infinite goodness of God Himself. Still, we possess sufficient reason and understanding, to form to ourselves some faint idea of what it is to lose God in hell. Proceeding with this thought, let us consider that a soul condemned to hell, loses for ever the pleasure of possessing and enjoying God. The moment it passes the threshold of that infernal dungeon, Almighty God infuses into that soul such a light as to enable it to understand wholly the infinite beauty and perfection of His being, as far as any creature may, together with a desire to possess Him so great and drawing, that the mere deprivation of such pleasure for a moment becomes an infinite source of pain. In the same instant, the frightful truth flashes upon that unfortunate soul, that for ever and ever he is cast out from his God - never, never, to enjoy Him.

The torments of hell are inconceivable; but there is no torment like to this.

Further: - a soul condemned to hell, loses altogether the care and protection of God. So long as a man remains upon earth, Almighty God keeps him and shelters him. He puts good thoughts into his mind, He awakens holy desires in his heart, He almost drives him to do good, He comforts and strengthens him. The moment the soul enters hell, all this comes to an end: God, so to speak, lays him by - and regards him as a thing not worth caring for. Hence, during all the long night of eternity, that soul never receives one good thought into his mind: he never has a holy inspiration, nor a pious desire, nor as much as one single wish to do something good. His imagination becomes filled with the most terrible pictures; his understanding is black and clouded; he wills nothing, but that which is prompted by rage and passion, the whole powers of his soul, are nought but darkness and the most bitter despair.

Again: - a soul condemned to hell, when it loses God, loses together with Him, the love and solicitude of all His creatures. Whilst we remain in this world, the Blessed Virgin, the Angels, and Saints, and our Angel Guardians, love us; but, once a man has been rejected by God, he is abandoned likewise by the holy spirits of heaven, and that for ever and for ever. So also with all those, who have loved us on earth. If a mother has been saved, she will have no compassion for her children who are lost: if a child is saved, it will not heed the torments and punishment awarded to its own parents. And if such is the feeling of those who are saved towards those who are lost, what must it be in hell itself! Husband and wife, brother and sister, the nearest relations, the best friends, fathers, and sons, will all burn with such an infernal frenzy and hatred towards each other, as those alone can know who have been sent for ever to hell. Amongst the countless multitude of souls confined in that terrible prison, not a single one will there be, whose presence will not add pain and torment without end to every other lost soul. We should never forget, besides, that the master of hell is the devil, who hates a human soul with the hatred of eternity: and to him is given a power and strength unknown here on earth, with the mind of a fiend, artful and keen in devising every manner of torture and pain for his victims. What an awful thing for a poor soul, to fall into such hands!

One more thought on the pain of "Loss." Having lost the enjoyment of God, what does the condemned soul find in His Almighty presence? It finds a deadly and eternal enemy. - But how, it may be asked, can God, Who is the highest Good, and Who is in Himself the greatest happiness of man, how can He become the enemy of man? And yet He can, and does. Let us then mark well how this happens. 1. God keeps up in the lost soul the most lively knowledge of His infinite beauty, and the strongest desire to possess Him: but this, far from being in the least satisfied, is but the cause of endless rebuffs and disappointment, so that the more the poor unfortunate is irresistibly drawn towards God, the greater the desolation which fills his heart. 2. The face of God, so lovely and amiable to the good, so entrancing, that the saints could have died to behold it but once - that face, wears to a lost soul the continual aspect of terrific anger. Hence, it will be ever seeking to flee from the divine presence: but, the further it goes, the nearer do those awful eyes approach. Oh, who can withstand the anger and rage of the living God? Nobody is able to tell us how great that pain must be. 3. The most welcome boon to a lost soul, would be to kill and destroy it. To pacify the just anger of God having become plainly impossible, the thought of death would then be a relief: - but no: as long as God lives, so long will live the unhappy souls in hell, and ever and again will commence their dreadful torments.

Have we now learned something of the pains of hell? have we now seen how great an evil is one mortal sin, if it brings forth so bitter a fruit? and if so indeed, what do we imagine will be the fruit of the seed we have sown in our own lives? have not we perhaps committed that sin; and if we have, how many times, and how often might we not have been plunged into hell? Oh, dreadful are the judgments of God, and severe His justice: to be for ever cast out from His presence, to be for ever delivered up to the power of the evil spirit - such are the wages of sin. But we have always believed these truths. Yes, - and for that very reason we are doubly to blame. We have believed with the Catholic Church, that one mortal sin was enough to separate us for ever from Jesus, enough to make us lose God for ever, enough to send us to hell for ever and ever; and yet how many amongst us have gone on without fear, blindly and madly - committing sin after sin? Oh, is not this blindness without example? He that has fallen into mortal sin, let him then turn to God and say, "O Jesus! I have sinned, it is true, and thus I deserved to lose Thee: but take not Thy mercy from me. I repent, I repent from the bottom of my heart. I might have been even now in hell: but Thou hast spared me. O good Jesus, I will never sin again, should it cost me my life and more. I desire to behold Thee face to face in Thy kingdom, and there I am determined to come through all troubles and temptations. O Jesus, grant me grace never more to commit a mortal sin."

And now, let us turn to Mary the Virgin Mother of Jesus, and demand her powerful protection against this great evil - sin. As we think of the flames of hell, there is nothing in truth we should not do in this life to avoid so shocking a fate, no labour we should not undergo, no help wo should not enlist on our behalf. But who can help us better than Mary? who can fight better for us against the devil? who is more pleasing to God, and who will sooner be heard by Him? Let us be devout to Our Blessed Lady, and if we have been so before, let us now redouble our devotion, that by continued prayer on our part she may obtain for us the grace never more to sin, and so avert the dreadful calamity of hell and its torments.

VISIT TO A SANCTUARY OF THIS BLESSED VIRGIN

There is no place in the world more justly celebrated for its devotion to Our Blessed Lady, than Rome. The Eternal City possesses no less than forty-six different churches dedicated to the honour of Mary, the largest and most beautiful of which is the Church of St. Mary Major. In Rome there scarcely exists a street, or even a single house, that does not boast at least of one image or picture of Our Blessed Lady, and not

unfrequently of many more. A light is always burning before them: and, on feast days, several. The devotion of the Roman people to Mary is very affecting, and quite striking to visitors. They seem never to have forsaken her, even in times of trouble and revolution; and she, in her turn, has without doubt protected them in a wonderful manner, averting sickness and plague, and restoring peace after civil disorders. In the Church of St. Mary Major's is preserved the crib, which held Our Blessed Lord at Bethlehem: and nothing can exceed the beauty and devotion of the scene when, before the midnight Mass at Christmas, the sacred crib is carried processionally in its case of gold and silver, and exposed to the veneration of the faithful. In the same church there is also the original likeness of Our Blessed Lady, painted by St. Luke, which always claims its flock of worshippers. Let us go there to-day, and following the example of the devout people of Rome, who drink daily the waters of the Faith from the Rock of Peter, let us say a prayer in spirit before the picture of Our Blessed Lady, in the Church of St. Mary Major, Rome.

PRAYER OF ST. ANDREW OP CANDIA

I salute thee, O full of grace! O Mary, if I place my confidence in thee, I shall be saved. If I am under thy protection, I have nothing to fear: I implore thee then, O holy Virgin, to grant me the help of thy prayers with God; prayers, which are dearer and more precious to us than all the treasures of the earth; prayers, which render God propitious to us in our sins, and obtain us a great abundance of graces, both for the pardon of our offences, and the practice of virtue, through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

1. Psalm, cx
2. St. Luke, xii. 4,5

Return to the Sixth Meditation... *Proceed to the Eighth Meditation...*

Saints' Prayers

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Meditations

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from the book

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Meditation VIII

On the Pain of "Sense" in Hell

We must not cease to examine the punishment prepared by God for mortal sin, without considering the pain of "Sense" in hell. We reflected in our last meditation on the dreadful torments, which are produced in a condemned soul by the pain of "Loss" but, it is not to be forgotten, that these are accompanied by other most terrible sufferings, working on the mind through the senses of man.

That we may allow this truth to impress itself more forcibly upon the understanding, after the example of King Ezechias, let us picture to our imagination the scene which the prison of hell presents even now at this moment. "I have said, in the midst of my days, I will go to the gates of hell." (1) Let us suppose, that for some good reason or other, perhaps through the prayers of our guardian angel, Almighty God has allowed us, as He allowed St. Teresa, to visit hell. And let us fancy that we are now standing upon a lofty hill, in the middle of a dark night, and that by the power which God has given us, we are looking down through the darkness into the very centre of hell, which opens out its dread expanse in the valley beneath. There lies before us an immense lake of burning fire, foaming and lashing itself about with inconceivable fury. - So great is the extent of this lake, that no man is able to measure it: yet upon all sides are visible, black impenetrable rocks, which rise up around like the walls of a fortress, and which present so dismal an aspect, as to preclude all hope of escape from the dreadful fire within. This sea of fire is composed of some dark and loathsome substance: brimstone it may be, or whatever else our minds may imagine it. It is never quiet, but always restless, rolling in all directions, and kept in continual motion by the breath of the vengeance of Almighty God for ever passing over it. Into

this frightful dungeon have been hurled all those, who from the beginning of the world have died in mortal sin.

In order to make ourselves more surely masters of the subject we are meditating upon, let us try to fix our attention upon the sufferings, not of the many, but of one only among those lost ones. Who can describe the tortures which he is now enduring, the awful agonies and pains, compared to which the infirmities of this life are in truth laughable? See how, in the very words of holy Scripture, he is "delivered to the torturers," (2) who with a fiendish malice are tearing him and tormenting him - the fire the while burning into his vitals. Fire, and nought but fire, circles itself round that unfortunate being. The head, the eyes, the mouth, the hair, are all on fire: the arms, the feet, the back, the breast, are covered all over with fire: his whole body is one mass of fire, like a piece of iron taken red hot from the furnace. Whatever he touches is fire. And yet more, the fire is inside as well as out. Worse still: the fire is not content with the body, but, by the permission of God, it penetrates even to his soul: it fastens on his understanding, it rends in pieces his memory and will - the entire powers of his soul are enveloped in this woeful fire. If we place but one member of our body, an arm or a foot, into the fire - what insufferable pain is the consequence I what must it not be then to burn, not in one limb, but in every part of the body and soul at the same time!

And what is the fire of hell? not such as we see in this world, beautiful and bright, conveying warmth and cheering us, and adapting its various capacities to our every want. The fire of hell is dark, horrible, and filthy, with no agreeable or goodly influence, created solely for torture and pain - the fire of eternal punishment. St. Thomas assures us that the smallest degree of pain produced by this fire is greater than all the pains of martyrdom, greater than all the sufferings which disease or misfortune may bring about in this life: and if a passing spasm in the body, such as the decay of a tooth, causes such dreadful agony - if people have been driven almost mad, through a little straw having got into one of their eyes - who, think we, can rightly imagine what it is to endure a whole crowd of disorders and pains inflicted together upon a poor lost one in hell!

O dreadful fire of hell, which burns not by chance or at intervals: but continuously, and without intermission, without relief, without hope of comfort or mercy! Here on earth, every sickness, every pain, has its moments of alleviation: but in hell, never, never. Could any person bear to lie on the softest bed for a whole night, in one position, without

changing? What then must it be, to find one's self, after thousands of years, still rooted to the same spot, where the same terrible torments have never ceased, with unremitting energy, to tear and worry the unfortunate sufferer in hell! Oh, may we not say with the prophet Isaias, "which of you can dwell with devouring fire? which of you can dwell with everlasting burnings?" (3)

There must be added to our considerations on the fire of hell, that also of the other indescribable torments, which assault, through the senses, those who are damned. The most disgusting stenches surround them. Their eyes meet with nothing but objects so revolting, that the most loathsome sights in this world are beautiful in comparison. Their ears ever listening to the most frightful blasphemies and curses, to furious howls and wailing most lamentable, and perhaps to the biting reproaches of those whose damnation has been brought about by their sins, such as a parent, or mayhap their own children, and this for all eternity I And then, as if nothing should be wanting to complete the full meed of suffering, there will be ever this maddening thought racking the brain of a lost soul - "I might have been saved," will each one exclaim to himself, "and now I am lost, lost for ever." Oh, how will not all the valuable opportunities of the life he mis-spent rise up then in judgment against him, the fostering care of his parents, the good instructions had received, the fervour of his companions, the pious books he read, the example he had, the many sermons he listened to, the inspirations God gave him, the Masses he heard, the sacraments he frequented, all the graces bestowed upon him, and refused to others - but which he despised and neglected, till it was too late. How often had he not heard the joys of heaven set forth, and the punishment of hell explained and described to him, just as he now feels it; hut he heeded not, and now he Is lost, and lost for ever. Oh, so terrible a state can no man on earth conceive. But we may imagine in some way the writhing and agony, with which his despairing mind will be forced to remember the precious occasions allowed for saving his soul, and how he would not take them, but went on always in sin, cursing and swearing, breaking the Lord's Day, perhaps blaspheming the doctrines of the Catholic Church, impure, hateful, passionate and proud, committing every sin in the face of God. And how patiently did that good God bear with him, and how long, till it was past endurance. The sentence, therefore, is most just. But, what a horrid fate!

Here then, we have some slight conception of the torments, inflicted through the senses in hell: but after all, say what one may, it is but a representation, a picture, and that but a poor one. Who can depict in their true colours, or describe in adequate language, the direful pains

and punishment of the damned? And for ourselves, what are we to think of them? As Catholics, we have always firmly believed these truths. But how have we lived? Probably, as though there existed no hell at all. We have committed perhaps sins without number, and have truly deserved hell a thousand times. How many of us might now be there, had not God, as we hope, dealt out to us a merciful pardon. We trust that with the sorrow we now have for our sins, God has forgiven us. We may sin again, however, and mortally too, and perchance die in our sins, and then be damned. So it is: for although the sin be forgiven, who can say that his disposition to sin is so dead, that he may not sin again? It is quite true then that we may commit mortal sin once more, and that one sin may be just one too many, and we may be lost for ever for it. What must we do, to prevent so dire a calamity to our souls as the eternal flames of hell? What can we do, in our sinfulness and nothingness, but turn our eyes towards heaven and beg for mercy. "O Jesus Christ," we should cry, "our God, our Redeemer, our all, do not abandon us. We have sinned, it is true, and deeply; but think on Thy sacred wounds, on Thy pains and sorrows suffered for our sake, on Thy Precious Blood which flowed for us. Remember, O Lord, the loving patience, the goodness with which Thou didst bear so long with us, the many times Thou didst forgive us, when Thou mightest with justice have cast us into hell. Must all this patient love and mercy go for nothing? Yet it must, if Thou dost not now take pity on us. Turn, then, O Jesus, in very compassion, Thy fatherly eyes towards us, spare Thy creatures once more, and bestow on us Thy grace, that we may never see in very deed those dreadful flames upon which we have this day meditated. And Mary, O sinless Virgin, full of grace, forget us not, though poor sinners we be. Faithfully believing all the Church sanctions with respect to thy wonderful patronage, we know that thou both canst, and art willing to help us. But still more, we feel that, as to enjoy thy presence and sit beside thee in heaven, is the next greatest reward to seeing and enjoying God Himself, so in proportion will thy loss be felt by those, who are doomed for ever to hell. O fatal loss, to lose the "Refuge of Sinners" in that awful place of punishment, never to see her who has helped us so often here on earth, and when all things around bode desolation and grief, never more to be able to look up for protection and mercy to her who was always the "Help of Christians." - O Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Our Blessed Lord, that we may never experience so great a loss, do thou but look down upon us, and after this our exile ended, do thou show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb - Jesus."

VISIT TO A SANCTUARY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN

Let us transport ourselves to-day in spirit to the noble city of Madrid, the capital of that fine old Catholic country, Spain. And after admiring the churches, which the true Faith has there erected to Mary, let us stray for a moment outside the walls, to the sanctuary of Our Lady of Atocha. This is one of the oldest sanctuaries that exist of all those, which have been dedicated by the Christian religion to the honour of the Mother of God: and so ancient is the image therein venerated, that some have supposed it to be the gift of St. Peter himself, whilst all agree, that it is at least coeval with the celebrated Council of Ephesus, held in the fifth century, against those who had impiously denied that Mary was the Mother of God.

The veneration for Our Lady of Atocha, may therefore well be said to date from the very cradle of Christianity. The imago has always been held in the highest reverence by the Spanish people; and the Spanish sovereigns of every age have evinced their love and respect, by a wonderful accumulation of gifts and presents. The kings of Castille were especially devout to this holy sanctuary: and it is an historical fact, that no monarch of Spain has ever dared to undertake a voyage or any enterprise of importance, without first praying at Our Lady's sanctuary of Atocha: and on their return, they never failed to go and thank her. In like manner, when the State has been in danger, through any untoward event: as of late years, when the Queen of Spain went solemnly to Atocha to give thanks, and to make her offerings, on the occasion of her life having been attempted by an assassin. Let us in an humble way imitate such glorious devotion, and join the noble Spanish people in venerating Our Blessed Lady, at her sanctuary of Atocha near Madrid.

PRAYER OF ST. ILDEPHONSUS, ARCHBISHOP OF TOLEDO

I come to thee, O Mother of God, and implore thee to obtain for me the pardon of my sins, and that I may be cleansed from those of my whole life. I beseech thee to procure for me the grace to unite myself in affection with thy Son, and with thyself; with thy Son as my God, and with thee as the Mother of my God. Amen.

1. Isaias, xxxviii, 10
2. St. Matthew, xviii, 34
3. Isaias, xxxiii, 14

Return to the Seventh Meditation... *Proceed to the Ninth Meditation...*

Saints' Prayers

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Meditations

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Meditation IX

On the Eternity in Hell

Our Blessed Saviour has asked us a question, which every one ought often to ask himself. "What," He says, "doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" (1) The answer is contained in the meditations, which we have made on the pains of hell. The soul that is damned, is cast out from God, and burns in hell for all eternity: - such is the profit gained by a man who loses his soul. But what is eternity? What does it mean, how does it affect a lost soul? This is what no one can fully tell us. And yet eternity is fast approaching. Let us see then, whether we cannot learn at least something concerning this great and awful mystery. O eternity, eternity! short word as it is, how much is contained within its dread embrace! What terrible realities, and what frightful forebodings, start up when there is question of eternity in hell!

First, then, we must remember that eternity has no end. Thousands of years may roll by, as many thousands as there are leaves upon the trees of the earth - as many as there are drops in all the oceans, rivers, and all the waters put together - as many as there are grains of sand by the sea shore: and after this, what will it be? Eternity! The half of eternity will

not have been passed over, nor the hundredth part, nor yet the thousandth. Eternity begins again, and will last so much more: and still it will go on a thousand times as long, yea a ten thousand and a million times as long. And after all this shall have gone by, the hundredth part of eternity is not yet accomplished, nor the thousandth - there is as yet nothing done. The unfortunate souls that are damned to hell, have been burning and enduring unknown torments all this long while, and now they must commence their sufferings anew! O mystery of all mysteries! O, of all thoughts, most fearful! Eternity! who is able to comprehend it?

Let us descend, as we have done before, spiritually into hell, and contemplate the state of one of those lost souls suffering there. Let us take Judas. Suppose it to be the lot of Judas, to shed one tear in every thousand years: and now behold that fallen apostle - already he has been near two thousand years in hell, and as yet he has not shed his second tear. What an immense number of years must still roll on, before he can fill one small river with his tears! But who can count the time which must pass, before his tears can mount so high as the waters of the deluge, before they can fill up every town and city, and cover the very mountains, before they can occupy the entire space between the earth and the sun. The distance between the earth and the sun is ninety-five millions of miles. What a tremendous number of years would be necessary to accomplish such a task! And yet - O great mystery! incomprehensible but true, true as that God Himself is truth - and yet a time would come, when the tears of Judas might have overflowed the whole earth, when they might have reached up to the very heavens, and still more, when these very tears might have been dried up again one by one, and when Judas, notwithstanding, must begin to weep again and to fill up the weary space as if he had never shed one tear. And this he might do hundreds, thousands, and millions of times: and what then will it be? Eternity! The half of eternity has not passed, nor any part of it - nothing has passed. The fallen angels, Cain, Judas, all those who have been condemned to hell from the creation of the world, how long have they not burned in the dreadful flames! But now, this very instant, they must begin to burn afresh, as if they had but just entered there.

In eternity, there is no pause. Hence the miserable souls in hell, cannot so much as comfort themselves with the hope of a little ease or refreshment. The gates of hell are shut against all this. Hope is a beguilement to every evil. There is no toil or suffering, which the possession of hope does not make tolerable. The most afflicted persons in this life are ever alive with the expectation that their miseries will end or change: but that solace is denied to the damned, whose wretchedness

will never come to an end, and whose torments will never alter. What a priceless happiness Would they not esteem it, if it were announced to them, that at some definite period, say thousands of years distant, a single drop of water - the drop that the rich man asked through Lazarus - should be dealt out to each of the souls in hell. Yet not this even shall they obtain: and after so many millions of years, those unhappy souls shall still be enduring the same tortures of body and mind, and as much devoid of alleviation as ever. O terrible eternity! for when a damned soul shall perceive that all relief and all hope of change is impossible, then it is that his heart will be rent asunder with rage and despair at the horrible fate before him.

To enforce this more strongly, let us imagine that we are looking at some particular place in hell, and that in that place are enclosed three of the damned. The first is swallowed up in a sea of sulphur, which suffocates him, and from which he is endeavouring vainly to extricate himself. The second is chained to a piece of rock, and is being tormented by two demons, one of which pours molten lead down his throat, whilst the other is sliming his body over with the same horrid material. The third is a prey to two monsters, in the shape of huge serpents: and whilst one, being wound about him, is gnawing his flesh and crunching his bones, the other creeps into his mouth, and tears his heart out. Let us suppose, if such could be, that Almighty God takes a little mercy on these three unfortunates, and orders, that every thousand years they should be freed for one hour from their agony, a drink of fresh water given them, and that then they should be sent back to their punishment for another thousand years. What a poor consolation! to suffer for a thousand years, and to rest but for one hour! Nevertheless, not even this exists in hell. To burn in those flames, and to obtain no repose, and this for ever! to be worried and torn by spiteful demons, to be lashed all round by ferocious serpents, to be covered all over with loathsome reptiles, to have no relief or ease, and for ever! to be always enduring the most horrible thirst and hunger, and yet unable to eat or drink, and this for ever! to be hated by God and by all His creatures for ever, to be cast out of heaven, and cursed into hell, for ever, for ever, and for ever - such, though feebly we conceive it, yet portrays to us in some way the awful truth of Eternity in hell.

Here then, we have hell and its terrors before us. We see that it is a place of ceaseless mourning, a place of intense suffering, a place of gloomy despair, the very place where perhaps we might have been long ago, had not the wonderful charity of God preserved us from so great a misfortune. Oh, let us exclaim a thousand times, "the Sacred Heart of

Jesus has loved us, otherwise we might now be in hell: the endless mercy of Jesus has spared us, otherwise we might now be in hell: the Precious Blood of Jesus has procured grace and forgiveness for sin, otherwise at this very moment we might all be in hell." Let us never forget to repeat this, and to praise Jesus for all eternity. And what is there we ought not to do, to redeem the time we have lost? O that precious gift of Time! what would not a poor condemned soul give, but for one half-hour of those whole days and weeks, which men mis-spend in this life, to come back and do penance for their sins! what contrition would they not excite themselves to, in the brief space of that one half-hour, and where would the penance be, rude enough or fervent, with which they would not rend their hearts and crucify their bodies? what tears for the past: what thanks to God, for having given them that short time more: what a firm resolution for the future! "O Lord Jesus, we make that resolution now, namely, to die a hundred times rather than offend Thee again. O merciful Jesus, help us to keep our promise, and so to use the time still allowed us, that our Eternity, instead of being where our sins have so often deserved, may be passed with Thee in Thy kingdom."

And, in the midst of such thoughts, can we forget Our Blessed Lady? what converted sinner *can* forget her? for if our hearts are now touched, and we start back afright at the punishment prepared for mortal sin, at the bare idea of eternity in hell, is it not certain that much, if not all, of this we owe to Mary? Has she not prayed for us? Doubtless she has, at all times; but particularly during this most sweet month of hers. Mary is, indeed, the Gate of heaven, which she is ever opening to poor penitent sinners: also, because Almighty God has so disposed that all graces should pass through her hands. And exercising this privilege in regard to us, what graces and blessings has she not showered upon us whilst we have been pondering over our sins, these last few days, and praying for pardon, Mary has looked on and carried our prayer to the throne of her Divine Son; and in return we have had sorrowing hearts, and minds full of a wholesome fear of God. Oh, how good Our Lady has - been to us. "Mother of Our Redeemer," we should often cry, "continue evermore so to pray; and may thy holy intercession procure for us that, which our sins do not merit - the grace of final perseverance, and the happiness of meeting thee in heaven, who on earth hath been our protector."

Amongst the Sanctuaries of Our Lady in Italy, scarcely any is better known than that called "La Consolata" at Turin. It dates its origin mainly from the twelfth century, and was founded in consequence of some extraordinary prodigies and miracles wrought at the intercession of the Blessed Virgin. This Sanctuary has always been much frequented, and

the sovereign and people of the country have been ever foremost in the love and honour displayed towards it. The princes of the house of Savoy have not been less zealous than other Catholic Sovereigns, in their devotions to Mary; and Duke Charles Emmanuel chose, in 1669, Our Lady della Consolata as the patroness of his states. For centuries, until lately, it was the custom of these princes to repair to the Sanctuary at certain times; and, naturally enough, so pious an example was well followed by their truly Catholic subjects. The people of Piedmont are quite as Catholic now as formerly: only, the sad persecution, which the Church endures there, is not unknown to us. Let us make up, by the fervour of a good spiritual visit to this once favoured Sanctuary, for all that is actually wanting there in love and respect for Mary. Let us especially pray to Our Lady della Consolata at Turin, to obtain from God that the veil which shrouds the hearts of the misguided men, who now rule that country, may be removed; and that so they may begin once more to fear God, and respect His Mother, as their fathers did of old.

PRAYER OF FATHER JAMES MERLO HORSTIUS

O Mary, Mother of God, Virgin of all virgins, undefiled, without example, for ever blessed, temple most pleasing to God, sanctuary of the Holy Ghost, gate of the kingdom of heaven, - incline, O Mother of Mercy, the ear of thy goodness to mine unworthy supplications, and of thy clemency be thou a kindly helper to me, a miserable sinner, in every hour of need. Amen.

1. St. Matthew, xvi, 26

Return to the Eighth Meditation... *Proceed to the Tenth Meditation...*

Saints' Prayers

selected from the annals of history unto our current day

Meditations

Meditations by Rev. John Wyse

from the book

'Devout Exercises: Compromising Meditations and Visits to the Sanctuaries of the Blessed Virgin for Every Day in the Month of May'

Meditation X

On the Fruit to be Drawn from the Previous Meditations

We have now pretty well understood the terrible fate that awaits a soul, which, instead of keeping its last end in view, has lost it through sin. All this working of the understanding, however, and the pictures by which our memory and imagination have assisted us, are of no use whatever, unless the Will also is made to do its part. We must consequently make up our minds to set to work in such a manner as to preclude all chance of our falling into eternal misery, and thus losing, the only end and aim of our life on earth. In other words, we must endeavour to draw practical fruit from our meditations.

The first fruit to be drawn from these meditations, is to endeavour to produce in our souls as perfect an act of contrition as possible for sin. Let every one therefore, search strictly his conscience, and say to himself - "How would it stand with me, if in one hour hence I were to appear before the judgment-seat of Jesus Christ? Am I quite ready? Have my confessions been made so sincerely and well, that I may trust my sins have been forgiven me? Is there nothing concealed in my heart, nothing about which I might well feel anxious? In short, am I ready to die this moment? Am I perfectly prepared to meet the face of my Judge?" Let us ever bear in mind that the first step which brings us nearer to God, the first approach to holiness, the first means towards interior peace, is to place our hearts, by contrition, in such a state as to feel ready to stand at a moment's warning before the tribunal of Almighty God. And whoever does not feel so, should lose no time in making a thoroughly good confession, with such exact a searching of the conscience, such a real and heartfelt sorrow, such candid and humble acknowledgments of sin, that when it is over he can safely say to himself, "now I have done what God requires of me, for the pardon of my sins; and with the dispositions I am now in, I may appear fearlessly before Christ to be judged." What

sweet comfort - what balm to the wounded soul, is such a confession: and what sure hope does it not give us of life eternal!

The second fruit to be obtained from our meditations, is to make satisfaction to God, as far as we are able, for our past sins. In order to move our wills to perform this, let us turn once again to the scenes we have witnessed before; - suppose that Almighty God were to send a ray of His heavenly light down into hell, and thus to address the unhappy Judas , "Behold, for more than eighteen hundred years hast thou burned in hell; I am now satisfied, and will extend mercy to thee; but upon this condition, that immediately thou returnest to the world, and that there for a hundred years thou bearest in silence, and cheerfully, every sickness and infirmity, every pain and sorrow of mind and body, every insult and affront that has ever been heard of, or borne by any man on earth; do this for the love of me, and I will forgive thee and will allow thee to enter heaven." Oh, who can describe the joy that would light up the heart of Judas, as he heard this news! "O infinite goodness of God," would he say in return; "boundless mercy to me, gladly do I accept this condition, and will suffer cheerfully all the troubles of earth, which ever mortal endured - not for a hundred years, but - for - double and treble that time, if only I can obtain forgiveness, and see at last Thy face in heaven." But that hour of grace shall never come for Judas. And now it is come for us. Is not the time, which God at present lends us, as great a gift - as infinite a mercy, as though he had actually drawn us back out of hell? Truly is it: and with these thoughts upon us, let us resolve for the future to bear every cross and trial manfully and with joy, to endure all the troubles of our various positions in life with cheerfulness, and to undergo every pain and sorrow sent us, without murmur, for the love of God. One mortal sin deserves an eternal punishment: and the small sufferings of this world, what are they, compared to the everlasting flames of hell?

The third fruit which these meditations should bear us, is the earnest endeavour, on our part, to avoid all venial sins, especially those, the commission of which leads to mortal sin. It is not enough to determine rather to die, than to commit a mortal sin: a similar resolution should be made, with respect to venial sins: otherwise no man can be sure of himself. Nothing can indicate more to a certainty the salvation of individual souls, than a great watchfulness about venial sins, joined with a great zeal in spiritual things. To insure our eternal safety, we must become zealous in prayer, zealous in humility, zealous in the bearing of injuries, zealous in self-denial and mortification, zealous in the love of God, and the love of our neighbour; and whosoever would procure for

himself this zeal and fervour, must take notice of the following: - 1. He must try never to allow any rash judgment, unjust suspicion, or contempt of his neighbour to remain an instant in his mind. 2. He must fight with groat perseverance against all temptations to anger and impatience, returning again and again to the struggle, if unsuccessful at first. 3. He must never allow himself to entertain for a moment any feeling of hatred or undue dislike to any person, no matter how much they may have injured him, always being ready to forgive and forget. 4. He must not permit any inordinate love to usurp his soul, shunning, with fear and trembling, the smallest approach to unclean thoughts. 5. He must be very careful never to go to the Sacraments without due preparation, or lazily to omit his thanksgiving after holy Communion. 6. He must endeavour to support all troubles and misfortunes with the utmost resignation, and a spirit of perfect submission to the will of God, never grumbling or murmuring, but taking all with equal joy from His holy hand. All this, and much more we might mention, is only to avoid venial sin. And now the question comes hard upon us - can we make up our minds to strain every nerve to do this or not? if not, the preceding meditations are of little use to us, we shall never advance one single step in the interior life, we shall never obtain true peace of mind, above all, we shall never attain to that state, in which we might readily meet with death at a moment's notice. We may hope, however, to be able to arrive at this determination. Let us turn, then, to Jesus, and say: "O Lord Our God, Who wast crucified for us, Thou hast now given us light enough to see what it is to lose Thee eternally. We acknowledge that we can never be sure of enjoying Thy presence in heaven, as long as we do not give ourselves entirely to Thee, so as to be willing to die rather than commit the least sin. Thou art our only end and aim in this life, and should it cost us every suffering this world has heard of, even death itself a thousand times, we are resolved to gain Thee and possess Thee in the life to come. O Jesus teach us to do Thy will."

The great St. Bernard was wont to remind himself of his last end by constantly repeating to himself these words - "O Bernard, Bernard, wherefore camest thou here?" and St. Bernard was the faithful servant of Mary. Who can doubt that his great devotion to the Mother of God procured him countless graces, amongst others that of keeping always before him that man was created for the sole purpose of loving and serving God, and by such means of saving his soul? Let us pray then fervently to Mary. "Mother of Him Who created us, look down upon us from thy bright throne above. Thou didst always keep thy great end before thee, and therefore art thou now in glory. We have sinned, and lost sight of our great end; but now we have found it again. Rejoice with

us at so happy a recovery; but pray, pray likewise that we may ever avoid all -sin, mortal and venial, and that our souls may be so reduced to the service and love of God, as to be quite ready and prepared should sudden death surprise us. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen."

VISIT TO A SANCTUARY OP THE BLESSED VIRGIN

One of the most celebrated of the Sanctuaries, which Catholic France has erected to the honour of the Mother of God, is without doubt that known as Notre Dame de la Garde at Marseilles. The Sanctuary stands in the suburbs of that city, upon a hill which slopes down into the sea. Nothing can be more beautiful or truly grand than the position it occupies, and the view from the summit of the mountain which holds it, is magnificent. The rich town of Marseilles, with its port and immense population on the one side, farther on a noble tract of country, and on the other the full expanse of the deep blue Mediterranean. Of a truth, the people of Marseilles have known how to honour Mary. It was in the year 1214 that this Sanctuary was founded, in a modest way at first, but with the lapse of time, offerings and devotions increased. By degrees, Our Lady de la Garde became one of the richest Sanctuaries known, and continued so till the epoch of the old French Revolution, when, amid the other spoils of the Church, the great silver image of Our Lady, adorned with many ornaments, was taken away and destroyed. But the piety of Marseilles has not decayed, and, with times of peace, have returned the votive offerings of the faithful. A superb statue of silver has again been placed there, and sumptuous gifts are never wanting. How the people of Marseilles love and reverence Our Lady de la Garde I and well they may, for she sits there like a queen upon her hill, protecting them from troubles by land, and dangers by sea. The sailors, as they return from their voyages, may be seen on the decks of their vessels saluting their Mother as they pass into port; and not unfrequently do they repair, on landing, to return thanks at Notre Dame de la Garde. So again with every one in that city. Mothers instruct their children, and all learn to love Our Lady. Let us go there likewise, and learn to love her. We may be strangers in Marseilles; but Catholics are at home wherever there is a Catholic church, the Blessed Sacrament, and Mary. Let us pray together, spiritually, in that sweet and goodly Sanctuary.

PRAYER OF ST. EPHREM

O immaculate and entirely pure Virgin Mary, Mother of God, Queen of the universe, our own good Lady! thou art above all the saints, the only

hope of the patriarchs, and the joy of the blessed. Through thee have we been reconciled to Our God; thou art the only advocate of sinners, and the secure haven of those who are sailing on the sea of this life; thou art the consolation of the world, the ransom of captives, the joy of the sick, the comfort of the afflicted, the refuge, the salvation of the whole world. . . We beseech thee to prevent thy Son, irritated by our sins, from abandoning us to the power of the devil. Amen.

Return to the Ninth Meditation... *Proceed to the Eleventh Meditation...*

Saints' Prayers

selected from the annals of history unto our current day

Meditations

Meditations by Rev. John Wyse

from the book

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Meditation XI

On the Kingdom of Christ

Hitherto we have been sorrowing for sin; and as the thought of the fearful malice which sin contains struck forcibly upon us, we determined to avoid sin, to love God from our whole hearts, and to seek Him henceforth as the only object in life. Being weak, however, and not knowing the way to heaven, nor yet the dangers of the road that leads there, we must now begin to look about us a little more, and perceive what we are trying to do, and what instruments we have to work with. Nothing is more important than this consideration: for what will it avail

us to know that we are sinners, to discover that we have lost sight of the true end of our existence, or that an awful punishment is prepared for sin, unless we learn how to remedy it all? In truth, many times have we heard these things before, and perhaps also, the impression they made, however little, has had its effect; we may have been more on our guard, and have gained some few victories; but how soon the good spirit wore away, and how easily betimes, after a few resistances, did we not relapse into the very same sins. And why? Because, although we knew this life was a warfare, we yet never began to fight in earnest; and this again, 1. because we have never clearly seen the nature of the fight: perhaps have never been aware that there was a fight at all; 2. because we have never sufficiently - understood who the combatants are, or cared to know the commander under whose standard we are fighting. We must therefore beg for the assistance of Almighty God to enable us to learn, by means of a parable, all that is requisite for us in regard of this.

Let us imagine to ourselves some great and good king, who rules over some powerful nation, and who is making preparations for a war which he is about to undertake. Having advised with himself, he proclaims his sovereign will to all his subjects. He invites them to come with him to the war. "Come," he says, " and follow me." And immediately, he begins to tell them all they will have to suffer in this war. "Their enemy is no common one; they will have to march all the day, with but little rest by night; they - will have to endure much hunger and thirst, for the country through which they are to pass is barren, and the provisions scarce; great burdens will be laid upon them, and accoutrements of heavy weight; the war may be long and severe, and the labours will doubtless be many and hard to bear." This account startles and appals them at first: but the cause is so just, and the war of such importance, and their king so loving and good, that one and all, with the greatest enthusiasm, they rush unhesitatingly to enlist in the arduous service. And good indeed is their king: for whilst they flock to his standard, what does he? "The hardships are great and numerous," he says to them: "but think not that I lay these on you, to carry of yourselves. Think not, whilst you fight for me, that I shall remain at home with ease. I will go with you to the war, and when a battle commences, I will descend into the very thickest of the fight, and there, when least expected, you will find me helping you each one individually in the midst of your struggles. I will suffer everything with you, even more than any of you, so that no one, as. he looks upon me, will have a right to complain. And besides this, I will provide such a wonderful means of support and assistance, that will astonish those that taste of it. You will thirst; but I will give you living water. You will hunger; but I will give you food that this world knows not of. You will be

worn out with fatigue, toils, and disease; but I possess a remedy that will cure all sickness, and restore the strength of your wearied limbs."

The subjects of this good king listen to his speech, and their souls are fired by it. At once they join with the invitation, they will be his soldiers, his servants, his very slaves - anything will they be, to fight for such a master. Hardships are nothing to them in such a cause; the labour is light, and as for long marches, and the consequent fatigue, what care they, when their king is ready to refresh and restore them? and thus they go forth to battle.

But as in imagination we see them winding their way over mountain, over valley, over rough roads and smooth, pursuing their journey in sunshine and storm, or betimes engaging manfully with the enemy, - supposing that one of these soldiers, or several, were to grow faint and weary through marching, to become fearful, and to lay down their arms and run away, or more truly, to go over to the enemy (for he who is not with this king must fight against him), what should we call them? what name should we give them? Is there any epithet too opprobrious, dastard, coward, or what not, by which we might not designate such traitors?

And now, let us simply apply this parable to the kingdom of Christ on earth.

Our Lord comes down from heaven to dwell amongst us. He calls us together - for we are His subjects - and communicates His divine Will to us, which is to subdue and conquer the kingdom of His mortal enemy, the devil. He summons us to help Him, not in the harsh and overbearing manner of a tyrant, but in the kindest and most loving of ways.

The enemies, He tells us, we are to fight against are - 1. the devil, and all his works and pomps; 2. the world, the deadly foe of Christ - ("My kingdom," He declares, "is not of this world:" therefore, the world is against Him, or His enemy,) 3. the flesh, and all the evil propensities of our fallen nature.

Nor are we less informed about all that we have to suffer. Contradictions without number, inducements to anger, excitements to lust and intemperance, impure imaginations, all the temptations which arise from avarice and the love of pleasure. Allurements again from evil companions, the contagion of bad conversation, first listened to unwillingly, then indulged in. Further, the reproaches or the scoffs of irreligious people, perchance of our own friends and relations, insults

from the world, at home, in the streets, in our open foes or our secret enemies, the undutiful conduct of children, or the scandalous behaviour of parents. Then, that other class of miseries, the offspring of sin in our bodies, such as cold, hunger, and sickness, and everything that poverty and wretchedness entail upon poor mortals. These are the hardships of our war, which is to be conducted against a wary and skilful general, well acquainted with all the wiles and stratagems of his art. And upon this undertaking have we ail entered, when we became Christians - all, no one excepted.

But what does Christ Our Lord? "You have not chosen me," He says, "but I have chosen you." (1) " As a father, therefore, tends his children, so shall I tend you. I will fill you with My grace, to comfort and strengthen you. When you ask for anything, you shall receive it, on the sole condition that you remain faithful to Me. When you are tempted to anger and pride, you shall look to Me for an example, you shall 'learn of Me to be meek and humble of heart,' (2) and to take the last place. You shall think how kind and charitable I am, how prudent and shortspoken, a man of few words. "When you are insulted, you shall call to mind how I was persecuted and abused, and that at the very moment I was doing good to Mine enemies; when you remember this, you will not complain. Still more, hunger and cold, and all the miseries of your poverty, will come thick upon you: but while you suffer them, think you I shall remain at home in comfort? Oh, no. I will descend amongst you, I will be a poor man like you, I will lie on straw in the winter's frost, I will become a carpenter's son, and work for My bread, which will often be scanty. I shall be poorly clad, and sometimes without the necessities of life. I shall hunger so, that My own disciples shall be forced to rub the ears of corn in their hands for food. And as for my bed, you shall see that 'the foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head.' (3) And, lastly," exclaims - Our Blessed Lord, "the devil, against whom you are going to fight, will tempt you, perhaps, more than all, with the pleasures of the flesh. He will represent the world as a place of enjoyment, the delights of which are unequalled; he will seek to attach you to it, to chain you to it. But, O My children, when thus you are tempted, look to Me, your teacher and example: I committed no sin, neither was guile found in My mouth; and yet, did I not fast and pray, did I not watch, did I not labour and travail, did I not deliver myself to My persecutors to be scourged and maltreated?" In such language does Our Blessed Lord, Our King, address us His subjects, when He calls upon us to follow Him to the war. But His address comes not harshly or severely, but in those sweet loving accents - "Follow Me:" for "he that followeth Me walketh not in darkness, but shall have the light of life;" (4) or if we grow

languid and careworn, with much trouble of body and mind, He bids us to "come to Him" we that labour and are burdened, and "He will refresh us." (5)

Let us allow this to penetrate deeply into our hearts. Let us ask Our Blessed Lord, to give us light to see His truth, and grace to embrace His cause; and if with such spirit we enter into this warfare, then shall every complaint, every murmur disappear. When insulted, we shall bear it cheerfully, and for the love of Christ; when stricken with poverty, in reverses and trials, we shall run to Christ for help : when tempted impurely, or to indulge too freely in worldly pleasures, we shall derive strength and grace to resist them from the thought of all Christ suffered for us. Oh, this is to belong to the kingdom of Christ; this is to "follow Him" - "to fight with Him" in earnest and in truth. May we then resolve forthwith to act upon such feelings, sincerely and generously to relinquish every evil thought, word, or deed for His sake, and henceforth to fight fervently against His enemies, which are also ours.

"And Mary, Mother of Christ, thou who didst follow Christ's footsteps, bodily, as well as in spirit, deign to help thy poor suppliants here below. Thou art now in glory, reigning in heaven with thy Son : we are as yet poor journeyers on earth. But thou wert once, as we are now, wanderers in this vale of tears. Help us with thy prayers: for we desire nothing better than to follow thy Son, Our Lord, and to fight by His side, that instead of being traitors to His cause, having fought the good fight, we may, by His Precious Blood, and thine intercession, deserve to enter the land we are fighting for - the eternal land of promise. O Mary, remember us in thine own sweet month of May.'

VISIT TO A SANCTUARY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN

At Venice, in the church of Santa Maria della Pace, there is an image of Our Blessed Lady, which has-been held for centuries in the highest veneration. The presence of this image has made a Sanctuary of the church; and the history of the image is told in a few words. In the year 788, Saint John Damascene, who is celebrated for his strong devotion to the Blessed Virgin, had had his hand cut off by order of the Greek Emperor, Leo the Isaurian. But having prayed, with many tears, before an image of Our Lady, his hand was restored to him, and the Saint was perfectly cured. This same image was afterwards translated to Venice, in the year 1349, and placed in the church of Santa Maria della Pace. Devout worshippers are often seen at this shrine, which is much honoured, especially in May: for Venice is very Catholic. In that town,

Pius VII was elected Pope; and all those who love Mary should remember, that to his zeal and piety the Church owes much of the devotion peculiar to the month of May, if not the very institution itself. Mary loves Venice, doubtless, for such a Pontiff; and let us, therefore, repair to her Sanctuary, and thank Our Blessed Lord for all the glory and devotion, which the Church has ever paid to His Mother.

PRAYER OF ST. JOHN DAMASCENE

I salute thee, O Mary! thou art the hope of Christians: receive the prayer of a sinner, who loves thee tenderly, honours thee in a special manner, and places in thee the whole hope of his salvation. From thee I have my life. Thou dost reinstate me in the grace of thy Son: thou art the sure pledge of my salvation. I beseech of thee, therefore, to deliver me from the burthen of my sins: dispel the darkness of my mind, banish from my heart the love of the world, repress thou the temptations of mine enemies, and so rule my whole life, that by thy means, and under thy guidance, I may obtain everlasting happiness in heaven. Amen.

1. St. John, xv, 16
2. St. Matthew, xi, 29
3. St. Luke, ix, 58
4. St. John, viii, 12
5. St. Matthew xi, 28

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The meditations or addresses to God which follow, inasmuch as they are put forth in the hope of rousing the reader's mind to the love or the fear of God, or to a careful scrutiny of himself, must not be read in the midst of noise, but in silence; nor yet rapidly, but in a leisurely manner, with close and severe study of their meaning.

Nor should the reader make it his aim to peruse any one of them from end to end without break; but just so much of it as he feels may be of service to him for enkindling a desire for prayer, or so much as may serve to refresh him.

Nor is there any need for him always to begin any one of them from the beginning; let him, on the contrary. begin where he prefers. And, indeed, it is for this reason that they have been divided into sections; * that the reader may easily choose a place for beginning or for stopping, and so avoid the weariness and annoyance which would be produced by too prolonged application to the book, or by repeated reperusal of one and the same passage; and that he may thus be the more likely to reap some pious dispositions from them; for this was the end had in view in their composition.

** Of the meditations attributed to St. Anselm, the majority, as we find them in the printed editions, are not characterised by bracketed headings or by subtitles; nor are their obvious subdivisions indicated by what we should call unbroken paragraphs. The translator has therefore ventured to insert into such of the meditations as do not in the printed editions show where they are capable of an unforced subdivision, a suitable subtitle, or at least a numerical indication. He has done this not irreverently, he trusts, to the saint, nor impertinently, he ventures to hope, to the reader. To the compassion of the one and to the indulgence of the other does he commit himself; adding only this, that whatever has been inserted by him is included within square brackets.*

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First Meditation

OF THE DIGNITY AND THE WOE OF MAN'S ESTATE

Our creation to the Image and Likeness of God.

Awake, my soul, awake; bestir thy energies, arouse thy apprehension; banish the sluggishness of thy deadly sloth, and take to thee solicitude for thy salvation. Be the rambling of improfitable fancies put to flight; let indolence retire, and diligence be retained. Apply thyself to sacred studies, and fix thy thoughts on the blessings that are of God. Leave temporal things behind, and make for the eternal.

What, then, in so divine an occupation of the mind, canst thou conceive more useful or more salutary than to recall in delighted musing thy Creator's boundless benefits to thee? Consider what grandeur and what dignity He bestowed on thee in the very beginning of thy creation, and ponder well what

loving and what adoring worship thou shouldest therefore pay Him.

It was assuredly a noble purpose which He formed for the dignity of thy state, when, creating and ordering the universal frame of the visible and the invisible creation, He determined to make man; for He determined to lavish richer honours on man's nature than on all other creations in the universe. Behold thy lofty origin, and bethink thee of the due of love thou owest thy Creator. "Let Us make man," said God, "to Our Image and Likeness" (Gen. i. 26). If thou awakest not at this word, O my soul; if thou art not all aflame with love of Him for His so ineffable graciousness of condescension towards thee; if thine inmost marrow burns not with longings after Him, what shall I say? Asleep shall I call thee? Or must I rather think thee dead? Consider diligently, therefore, what it is to have been created to God's Image and God's Likeness; thou hast in this thought the sweet earnest of a pious meditation in which thy musings may have full play.

Observe, then, that likeness is one thing; image another. For example, the horse, the ox, or other dumb animal may have a certain likeness to man; but the image of man is borne by none but a human being. Man eats, so does the horse; here is a certain likeness, a certain something common to creatures of diverse moulds. But the image of man is only borne by some human being, some being of selfsame nature with that man whose image he is. Image, therefore, is of a higher order than likeness.

God's Likeness, then, may be attained by us in this way; if, musing on Him as the Good, we study to be good; if, owning Him the Just, we strive to be just; if, contemplating Him the Merciful, we make endeavours after mercy.

But how to His Image? Listen. God ever remembers Himself, understands Himself, loves Himself. If thou, therefore, after thy poor fashion, art unweariedly mindful of God, if thou understandest God, if thou lovest God, thou wilt then be man "to His Image;" for thou wilt be striving to do that which God does eternally. 'Tis the duty of man to bend his whole being to this task; the task of remembering, of understandings and of loving the Highest Good. To this idea should every thought and

every turn and folding of thy heart be moulded, chased, and formed; to be mindful of God, to understand Him, and to love Him; and thus savingly exhibit and display the dignity of thine origin in that thou wast created to the Image of God.

But why say that thou wast created to His Image, when, as the Apostle testifies, thou art indeed His Image? "The man," he says, "ought not to cover his head, because he is the image and glory of God" (1 Cor. xii. 7).

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OF THE DIGNITY AND THE WOE OF MAN'S ESTATE

To praise God eternally the end of our creation.

Are, then, these so incalculable benefits of thy Creator inducements enough to thee for continual thanksgiving in return, and for discharging the debt of an endless love; when thou considerest that out of nothing -- rather, out of clay -- thou wast raised by His bounty to so excellent a dignity in the very beginning of thy state? Test thy life, therefore, by the master-feeling of the saints, and note well what is said of the saint, "With his whole heart he praised the Lord" (Ecclus. xlvii. 10). Behold the end of thy creation, behold the task set thee as God's servant! Why should God have graced thee with the privilege of so illustrious a lot, if He had not willed thee to apply thyself unceasingly to the praise of Himself? Thou wast created for the glory of thy Creator, that, making His praises thy employment, thou mightest ever advance towards Him by the merit of justice in this life, and mightest live happily in the world to come. For the praise of Him yields the fruit of justice here, and of beatitude hereafter.

And if thou praise Him, praise Him with all thy heart, praise Him by loving; for this rule of praising has been laid down for the saints -- "With all his heart he praised the Lord, and loved God who made him" (ib.).

Praise then, and praise with all thy heart; and whom thou praisest, love; for, for this wast thou created, to praise Him, and to love Him also. For that man praises God, but not with all his heart, who is charmed by prosperity into blessing God, but checked by adversity from the privilege of blessing; whilst that man praises, but without loving, who amid his praises of God seeks for some other good in praising than God Himself. Praise therefore, and praise aright; in such wise that there be in thee no care, no aim, no thought, no anxious bent of mind, uninspired by praise of God, grace helping thee. From praise of Him let no prosperity of this present life seduce thee, nor no adversity restrain thee; for thus shalt thou praise Him with all thy heart. But when thou shalt praise Him with all thy heart, and praise with the homage of thy love as well, then wilt thou desire nothing from Him but Himself, and thou wilt pray that the object of thy longing may be *God*; the reward of thy toil, *God*; thy solace in this life of shadows, *God*; thy possession in that blissful life to come, *God*.

Yes, indeed, thou wast created for this; to praise Him, and to praise Him without end; which thou wilt then more fully understand when, entranced by the blessed vision of Himself, thou shalt see that by His sole and gratuitous goodness thou, when thou wast not, wast created out of nothing; so blessed, and to such unspeakable bliss created; created, called, justified, glorified. Such a contemplation as that will give thee an untiring love of praising Him without end; from whom, and through whom, and in whom thou wilt rejoice in being blessed with blessings so great and so unchangeable.

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OF THE DIGNITY AND THE WOE OF MAN'S ESTATE

Wherever we are, we live, move, and are in Him; whilst also we have Him within us.

But, returning from the beatitude that is to be, do thou with the eye of contemplation consider for a while the abundance of grace wherewith He hath enriched thee even in this fleeting life. He, very God, whose dwelling is in heaven, whose throne among the angels, He to whom heaven and earth, with all that they contain, do bow down and obey, has offered Himself to thee as thine abode, and furnished and prepared His presence for thee; for, as the Apostle teaches, "in Him we live, and move, and be" (Acts xvii. 28). So to live, how sweet! So to move, how lovable! So to be, how desirable! For what more sweet than to have life in Him who is the very life of bliss itself? What more lovable than to rule each movement of will or act of ours towards Him and in Him, seeing that He will stablish us in an unending security? What more desirable than in aspiration and in act evermore in Him to be, in whom alone -- or rather who alone -- is true being, and apart from whom none can rightly be? "I AM WHO AM," He says (Exod. iii. 14); and beautifully said it is, for He alone truly IS, whose Being is unchangeable. He, therefore, whose so unapproached Being is being in so transcendent and unique a sense that He alone truly IS; in comparison of whom all being is no being; when He would create thee to so great excellency that thou couldest not even comprehend the lustre of thy dignity, what did He set as the sphere of thy being, what place of abode did He furnish for thee? Hear Him Himself speaking to His own in the Gospel, "Abide in Me, and I in you" (St. John xv. 4). O inconceivable condescension! O blissful abiding! O glorious interchange! What condescension of the Creator, to will that His creature should in Him have dwelling! What inconceivable blessedness of the creature, to dwell in the Creator! How great glory of a rational creation to be, by so blessed an interchange, associated with the Creator, as that He in it and it in Him should have their dwelling! Yes, He of His mercy has willed that we, so highly ennobled in our creation, should have the farther dignity of dwelling in Him. He, governor of all things, without care or solicitude existing over all; He, source and foundation of all things, without toil sustaining all; He, superexcellent above all things, without vain-glory transcending all; He, embracing each and everything that is, without extension of Himself enfolding all; He, the plenitude of all things, without narrowing of Himself, fulfilling all, -- yes, indeed. He, though His Presence is nowhere wanting, has

chosen for Himself a kingdom of delights within us; the Gospel bearing witness where it says, "The Kingdom of God is within you" (St. Luke xvii. 21). And if the kingdom of God is within us, and if God dwells in His realm, does not He whose kingdom is within us abide Himself within us? Clearly so; for, in like manner, if God is wisdom, and if the soul of the just is the dwelling of wisdom, he who is truly just has God abiding in him. And the Apostle says, "The temple of God is holy, which temple you are" (1 Cor, iii. 17).

Do thou, therefore, apply thyself unweariedly to the pursuit of holiness, lest thou cease to be the temple of God. He Himself says of His own, "I will dwell in them and walk in them" (2 Cor. vi. 16.). Doubt not, therefore, that wherever there are holy souls, there He is in them. For if thou art in those limbs of thine which thou quickenest, wholly and in all their parts, how much more is God, who created thee and thy body, wholly present in thee through and through? It is thy duty, then, to think with most intense devotion with what consideration and what reverence we should control those senses and those members of our body, over which the very Godhead sits in charge. Let us offer, therefore, as is meet, the whole empire of our heart to so great an Indweller, that nothing in us may rebel against Him; but that air our thoughts, all the movements of our will, all our words, and the whole course and tenour of our actions may wait upon His beck, stand obedient to His will, and be conformed to His rule of right. For thus shall we truly be His kingdom, and He will abide in us; and we, abiding in Him, shall live aright.

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OF THE DIGNITY AND THE WOE OF MAN'S ESTATE

All of us who have been baptized in Christ have put on Christ.

Rouse thyself, my soul; rouse thyself, and let the fire of a love from heaven blaze in thy inmost parts, and learn thou carefully the dignity bestowed on thee by thy Lord God; and learning, love; and loving, revere with the addresses of a holy practice. Does not He who has assigned thee a dwelling in Himself, and has deigned to dwell in thee, does not He clothe thee, deck thee, and adorn thee with Himself? "As many of you," says the Apostle, "as have been baptized in Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. iii. 27). What worthy meed of praise, then, and of thanks wilt thou pay Him who has invested thee with such grace and exalted thee to so great dignity, as that with thy heart's happiest outburst of joy thou mayest well exclaim, "He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, and with the robe of justice He hath covered me" (Is. lxi. 10)? To the angels of God, to gaze on Christ is supremest joy; and, lo, of His infinite condescension He has bent Himself to thee so low as to will thee to be clothed with Himself. What sort of clothing can it be, but that of which the Apostle glories when he says, "Christ . . . is made unto us of God wisdom and justice and sanctification" (1 Cor. i. 30)? And with what stately robes could He have more richly decked thee than with the amice of wisdom, the apparel of justice, the fair covering of sanctification?

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We are the Body of Christ.

Yet why should I say that Christ has clothed thee with Himself, when He has joined thee to Himself so intimately as to choose that in the unity of the Church thou shouldest be of His very Flesh? Listen to the Apostle as he sets forth the witness of Scripture, "They two shall be in one flesh; I speak in Christ and in the Church" (Eph. v. 32). And then again meditate on the closeness of union of their espousal. "Ye are," he says, "the Body of Christ, and members of member." Treat, then, thy body and its members with the respect which beseems them; lest if thou treat them wrongfully by any heedless management soever, thou be subjected to so much the severer punishment for thy unworthy usage, as thou wouldest have been crowned

with a nobler prize for treating them as they deserved. Thine eyes are the eyes of Christ; therefore thou mayest not turn thine eyes to gaze on any kind of vanity; for Christ is the Truth, to whom all vanity is entirely opposed. Thy mouth is the mouth of Christ; therefore thou mayest not -- I speak not of detractions, nor of lies -- thou mayest not open for idle speeches that mouth which should be reserved only for the praises of God and the edification of thy neighbour.

So, too, must thou think of the other members of Christ intrusted to thy keeping.

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A consideration of our sins for the which our conscience does the more sting us and by which we have forfeited all these blessings.

But whilst thou considerest to what and how great blessings thou hast been advanced by His grace, reflect also what and how great blessings thou hast by thine own fault foregone, and into what evils thou hast fallen, overburdened by a load of sins. Ponder with sighs over the ills thou hast wantonly committed; reflect with groans and tears over the blessings which by those same ills thou hast miserably lost. For what good has not thy all-bountiful Creator of His goodness lavished on thee? And what ill hast thou not paid Him in requital, grown wanton in execrable impiety? Thou hast cast away good, and merited evil; nay, made shipwreck of good, and freely chosen evil; and, the grace of thy Creator being thus lost, or rather thrown away, thou hast miserably incurred His wrath. Thou hast no resource for proving thyself innocent when a crowd of evils done by thee surrounds thee like a countless army, here confronting thee with thy unholy deeds, there marshalling an innumerable host of unuseful and, what is more to be condemned, of harmful words; and there yet again parading an infinite array of wicked thoughts. These, then, are the price for which thou hast foregone inestimable blessings; for these hast thou forfeited the grace of thy Creator. Conjure them up, and grieve over them; grieve over them, and renounce them; renounce them, and condemn them; condemn them, and change thy life to a better course. Wrestle with thyself in thy heart of hearts, lest even for a moment's space thou give consent to any kind of vanity, whether in heart, or tongue, or, worst of all, in act. Let there be a daily, or rather an unceasing, struggle in thy heart, lest thou keep any kind of covenant with thy faults. Ever and unremittingly examine thyself severely; peer into thy secret depths; and, whatever thou findest wrong in thee, by a vigorous reproof smite it, lay it low, bruise it, crush it, fling it from thee and annihilate it. Spare not thyself, flatter not thyself; but in the light of the morning -- that is to say, in the view of the last assize, which, like morning beam, is breaking on the night of this present life -- slay all the sinners in the land -- that is to say, the sins and delinquencies of thine earthly life -- and so destroy out of the city of God which thon shouldest build to Him in thyself all those that work iniquity -- that is, all

diabolical suggestions, all delights hateful to God, all deadly consents, all froward acts. From all of them must thou, as the city of God, be thoroughly cleansed, that thus thy Creator may find, possess, and keep in thee an abode pleasing to Himself. Be not of those whose obstinacy very God seems to bewail when He says, "There is none that considereth, in his heart, and saith. What have I done? (Is. lvii. 1.) If they are to be cast away who have refused to blush, and to accuse themselves for the sins they have committed, canst thou neglect to arraign, to judge, and with strict discipline chastise thyself? Review, then, in careful thought the innumerable blessings wherewith thy Creator has ennobled thee, no merits of thine own intervening, and call to mind thine own unnumbered evils, thy sole response -- O, how wicked and how undeserved! -- for all those His benefits; and cry out in the pangs of a great grief, "What have I done? Provoked my God, challenged my Creator's anger, repaid Him innumerable ills for untold goods. What have I done?" And speaking thus, rend, rend thy heart, pour forth sighs, weep showers of tears. For if thou weepest not here, when wilt thou weep?

And if the averted Face of God do not excite thee to contrition -- a Face averted from thy sins -- at least let the intolerable pains of hell, which those sins have provoked, break thy hard heart.

Return then, sinful soul, return into thyself. Draw thy foot out of hell; so mayest thou escape from the evils due to thee, and recover the lost goods of which thou art so justly bereft; for if thou revert with pleasure to thine own evils, then all the goods given thee by Him are lost and thrown away. It behoves thee, therefore, ever to keep a strict eye upon them, and chiefly those of which thy conscience does the more bitterly accuse thee, that so He may turn away His eye of anger from them. For if thou tumest aside thy sins with a due intention of satisfying for them. He turns aside His glance of retribution. If thou forgettest. He remembers.

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A review of our Lord's Incarnation by means of which the we have recovered all these losses.

And that thou mayest be set free from them, think of the compassions of thy Redeemer towards thee. Of a truth thou wast blinded by the guilt of original sin, and couldest not scan thy Creator's royal heights. Sins like a fog enveloped thee; thou wast drifting to the realms of darkness, and, swept on by the whirling current of thy faults, thou wast hurrying to the eternal glooms; when lo, thy Redeemer applied the eye-salve of His Incarnation to thy blinded orbs, so that, albeit thou couldest not discern God shining in the secret chamber of His Majesty, thou mightest at any rate behold Him made manifest in man; and beholding, own; and owning, love; and loving, strive with all thy might to arrive at last at His glory. He was Incarnate to recall thee to a spiritual state; He became partaker of thy changeful lot to make thee sharer of His immutability; He stooped to thy, lowliness that He might raise thee to His heights.

He was born of virginal integrity in order to heal the corruption of our wayward nature; circumcised, to teach man the duty of cutting away all excesses, whether of sin or of frailty; and offered in the temple and fondled by a holy widow, to teach His faithful to frequent the house of God, and aim by the pursuit of sanctity to merit to receive Him to themselves. He was embraced by the aged Simeon, who sang His praise, that so He might display to us His love of sober life and ripened character; and baptized, that thus He might sanctify for us the Sacrament of Baptism. And when in the Jordan, stooping to baptism at the hand of John, He heard the Voice of the Father, and received the Holy Spirit's advent under the figure of a dove, it was to teach us how to stand in unvarying humility of soul -- as is intimated by the Jordan, which is by interpretation *their going down* -- and so be favoured with converse with our heavenly Father, of Whom it is said, that 'His communication is with the simple' (Prov. iii. 32), and exalted by the presence of the Holy Ghost, Who takes His rest with the humble; at the hand of John withal, a name signifying *the grace of God*, that, whatever we receive from God, we ascribe all to His grace, not our merits. And when He had completed His fast of forty days, and was gloriously tended by ministrant angels. He taught us how, by turning away from the enticements of transitory things, all through the course of the present life to trample the world and the prince of the world under our feet, and so be guarded by troops of angels. By day He converses with the people, preaching the Kingdom of God to them, and edifies the surging crowds by His miracles and His doctrine; by night He frequents the mountain, and spends the time in prayer: hinting to us how, at one time, as opportunity offers, to point the way of life, according to our measure, by word and by example to our neighbours among whom we live; how at another, to betake ourselves to thoughtful solitude, and climb the hill of virtues, and yearn after the sweetnesses of high contemplation, and with unweariable desire direct our soul's bent to the things that are above. 'Tis on the mountain that He is transfigured before Peter and James and John; thus hinting to us that if like Peter (which is interpreted *acknowledging*) we humbly acknowledge our infirmity, if we endeavour to be made supplanters of vices (for James, or Jacobus, means *supplanter*) and strive faithfully to yield ourselves to the grace of God (for this is signified by the name of John), we shall climb all happily that heavenly mountain, and behold the glory of Jesus; Jesus our King Himself

being our Guide. 'Twas in Bethany that He woke Lazarus out of sleep (Bethany is interpreted *the house of obedience*); showing thus that all who by the eflfort of a right will die to this world and rest in the bosom of obedience, shall be wakened up by Him to everlasting life. Intrusting His Body and Blood to His disciples in the mystic supper, He humbly washed their feet; teaching us that the dread ministries of the altar must be celebrated with purity of deed and pious humihty of mind. And then, or ever He was exalted in the glory of His holy resurrection, He endured the jests and the rough speeches of perfidious men, the shame of the Cross, the bitterness of gall, and at last death; in all this admonishing His own, that they who desire to attain after death to glory should not only endure with even mind the toils and distresses of the present life, and the oppressions of the wicked, but should love all hardnesses that this world can give, for, the sake of guerdons through eternity; should love them, court them, and thankfully embrace them.

These, therefore, so glorious and countless benefits of thy Creator, if thou endeavour to ponder them worthily, to embrace them devoutly, and to imitate them with a fervent love, not only shalt thou recover the good things lost to thee through thy first parent, but by the unspeakable grace of thy Saviour thou shalt have far higher goods for thy possession through eternity. For thine own very God being made thy Brother by the mystery of the Incarnation, what unspeakable joy has He not insured thee against the day when thou shalt see thy nature exalted in His Person over all creation!

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OF THE DIGNITY AND THE WOE OF MAN'S ESTATE

The duty of praying to he drawn out of the pit of misery and the mire of dregs.

What then remains but, duly considering all these things, by all means possible to rouse thy heart's ardours towards the attainment of so great blessings, and to implore Him who created thee for their possession to snatch thee out of the pit of misery and out of the mire of dregs, and to make thee possessor of so great happiness? For what is the "pit of misery" but the gulf of worldly desire? And what is the "mire of dregs" but the filth of carnal pleasure? For these, that is to say cupidity and pleasure, are two bands or leashes by which the human race is checked and held back lest it should attain the blessed liberty of heavenly contemplation. For in truth earthly desire is a pit of misery, a pit which engulfs the soul it has enthralled by numberless desires, and drags, as strongly as ever chains could drag, into a deep, a gulf of vices; and then allows her to have no rest. For the mind of man, once crushed by the yoke of cupidity, is dissipated from without by the love of visible things, and distracted from within by conflicting passions. Toil in acquiring, anxiety in multiplying, delight in possessing, fear of losing, distress at having lost; these all make havoc of her, nor do they allow her to see what danger she is in. This is the pit of misery, and these are the ills with which worldly cupidity for ever stores it. From this pit it was that the blessed David rejoiced that he had been rescued, when

he broke forth into thanksgiving, and exclaimed, "He hath brought me out of the pit of misery and the mire of dregs" (Ps. xxxix. 3). And the "mire of dregs," what is that? It is the delight of unchaste pleasure. Cry aloud, then, with the blessed David, and say to thy Creator, "Draw me out of the mire, that I may not stick fast" (Ps. lxviii. 15). Cleanse thy heart from every stain of carnal delight, shut out impure musings from thy soul, if thou dost really long to get free out of the filth of this mire. But when by penance, by confession, by tears, by carefully inviting holy thoughts into the heart, thou hast clean escaped, then beware that thou fall not back; but from the deep of thy heart of hearts sigh thou in the sight of God, and implore His mercy that He would set thy feet upon the rock; ask Him, that is to say, to establish thy heart's affections in the strength of Christ; that thy mind may root itself on the solid ground of justice, clinging inseparably to Christ, of whom it is said that He is "made unto us of God wisdom and justice and sanctification" (1 Cor. i. 30). Pray Him also to direct thy steps that they turn not back to sins, but may advance with unvarying course and inflexible intent in the way of His heavenly precepts, and may hasten on with full determination to the angels' blissful home.

But, in aspiring to such a goal as this, be not remiss in praising thy Creator; rather supplicate His mercy that He would put a new song in thy mouth, and help thee to sing with due devotion a hymn to our God. For it is meet that a soul united to God in a new life should ever sing a new song in His praise, despising temporal things and yearning only for eternal; obeying the Divine law now no more from fear of punishment, but from love of justice. For the singing of the new song to God is this, to crush the desires of the old man, and with thy whole heart's endeavour, and with a sole desire of eternal life, to walk the ways of the new man which have been pointed out to the world by the Son of God. And he sings a hymn to God who treasures in pure mind's recollection the joys of that heavenly home and strives to reach them, supported by the consciousness of a holy life, and relying on the gift of supernatural grace.

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